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AL : SOME TALES, SOME TRUTHS

Nagendra Sharma

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SOME TALES, SOME TRUTHS

श्रद्धेय दाज्यू डा० डिल्लीरमण रेग्मीज्यू
तथा परिवारमा —
बडा दशैंको हार्दिक मंगलमय शुभकामना —
सहित —

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Nagendra Sharma

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FOREWORD

Almost everybody interested in this part of the world now knows about Nepal, her tales and her truths. Tales, for instance, that the entire Himalayan region was once under the ocean, that Kathmandu itself formed part of a huge prehistorical lake and the like.

Yet, there are some others which not many people have read or heard about, and, beginning with my first collection of newspaper write-ups ("THIS IS NEPAL" Sajha Prakashan, Kathmandu, 1978), I have tried to delve into them and jot them down for the benefit of the uninitiated.

This publication, in a sense, forms a follow-up on similar line and contains a random sampling from my writings in the weekly column, "Cultural Landscape", that used to be published in The Rising Nepal daily. I have, through most of my writings in the series, tried to capture the essence of a legacy that is typically Nepalese, and thus hoped to bring Nepal to those who may or may not visit this mountain kingdom.

Many readers, I also feel, may find myself extolling the virtues of everything that comes under the generic term 'Nepal' or 'Nepalese'—even at the cost of literary or journalistic objectivity. I don't deny that this has been the case a number of these essays.

But with all its lapses and faults, I shall feel gratified if this humble effort serves to entertain my readers besides providing a glimpse into some aspects of our life, past and present.

—Nagendra Sharma

Gorkhapatra Sansthan,
Kathmandu,
May 1, 1987

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The

Indrajatra

Of Old

Kumari or 'The Living Goddess'

The *Indra Jatra* as a Kathmandu tradition is popular to this day. But it has undergone quite some modifications with the passing of times.

During the Rana heydays, for instance, two prominent features of this festival included the dance of the *Bhadinis* at Hanuman Dhoka quadrangle and the *Bhakku* sacrifice within the Narayanhity palace premises. *Bhadinis* were professional dancing women and their rather erotic antics were a prominent attraction in the evenings. It is said that, once a young army officer was so enamoured of a comely *Bhadini* as to be "seduced" by the latter. That was the end of the *Bhadini* dance tradition too!

The *Indra Jatra* chariot procession, carrying the vestal virgin, used to be taken round down-town Kathmandu, including the Lagan, Brahma Tole and Bhimsenthan areas, jointly known as the '*Tallo* Tole' or "*Desh*". The procession was joined, in person, by all the state dignitaries, including the ruling monarch or his representative and the prime minister as long as it lasted. This practice was also discontinued in 1950.

The other procession route passed through the *Maathillo* (or Upper) Tole comprising more or less the area through which it is taken around till this day

The *Bhakku* sacrifice may be described as Bull-Fight, Nepali version. Only that, here it was a he-buffalo that took the place of the Spanish or the Mexican bull. There were two areas selected for holding this pageantry—one at the Hanuman Dhoka palace and the other inside the Narayanhity Royal Palace. The contestants included the *Lakhe* ritual dancers of Kathmandu and the youth of the *Duiyan* community hailing from areas adjacent to the Halchok Bhairav temple.

Making an offer of a he-buffallo to the "Bhakku" was a great spectacle, the greatest single attraction of the Indra Jatra. Two persons, one known as the Bhakku and the other as the Bhairav, primarily featured in this pageantry *par excellence*. The role of the former was more akin to that of an animal-teaser or a 'diverter', while the latter was the man chosen for actually sacrificing (or rather slaughtering) the he-buffalo.

The arena was known as the *Bombai Chowk*— reached by outsiders after crossing two entrances, first the main south-gate entrance leading to the palace compound and, second, another eastern-gate entrance leading to the arena proper.

That many a gate-keeper closed his eyes on the townsfolk, particularly youngsters, seeking an entrance into the bamboo or woodfenced and expansive arena was not without purpose: a shouting, hooting and clapping crowd would not only add to the spectacle but would also help scare the chosen animal in the process. But the hawk-eyed guards were always on the look out for Brahmin youths—anyone suspected of being of Brahmin blood would find his entry doubly difficult. For the simple reason that, should the intoxicated and infuriated he-buffalo gore a Brahmin to death, the organisers of the pageantry would invite a 'heavenly wrath' of the unthinkable sin of a *Brahma-Hatyaa* ("Brahmin-cide").

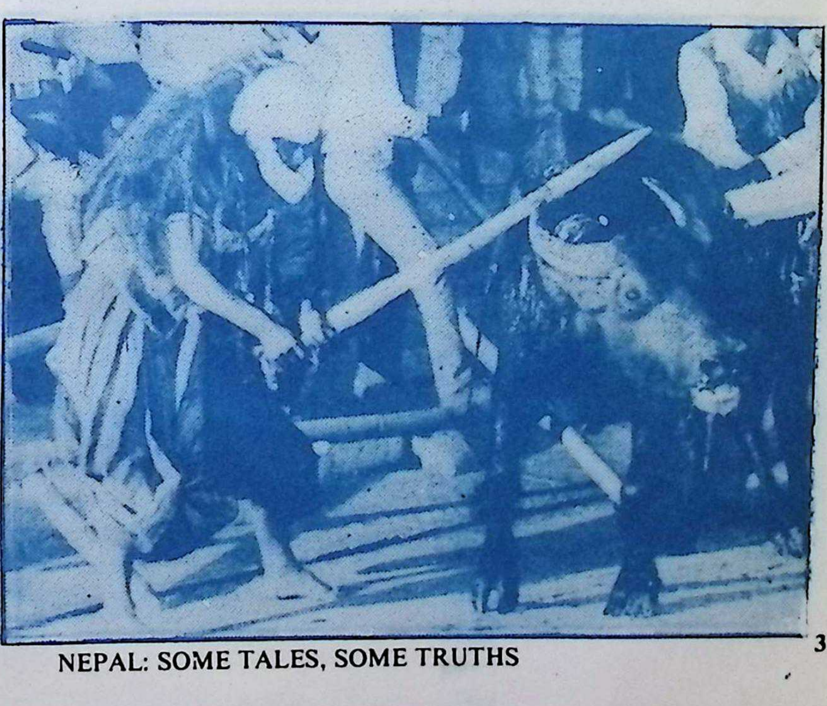
For many days in advance, a number of stout and selected he-buffaloes would be reared in darkened dungeons in preparation for their doomsday. Prior to their being led into the arena on the final day, the he-buffaloes were even said to be treated liberally, if forcibly, with alcohol so as to get them, sufficiently intoxicated. Attendants entrusted for the purpose would usher the sturdy he-buffaloes in, and, among them, only those considered fighting-fit, would be left in the arena, others being led back to their sheds. Then the bars would be closed against the selected animal, his destiny being to face, all alone, the Bhakku and the Bhairav, the latter armed with deadly scimitars, and the jeering, teasing, fence-sitting crowds.

The turn of the teasing crowds over, two persons, garbed in red and masked as Bhakkus, would enter the arena.

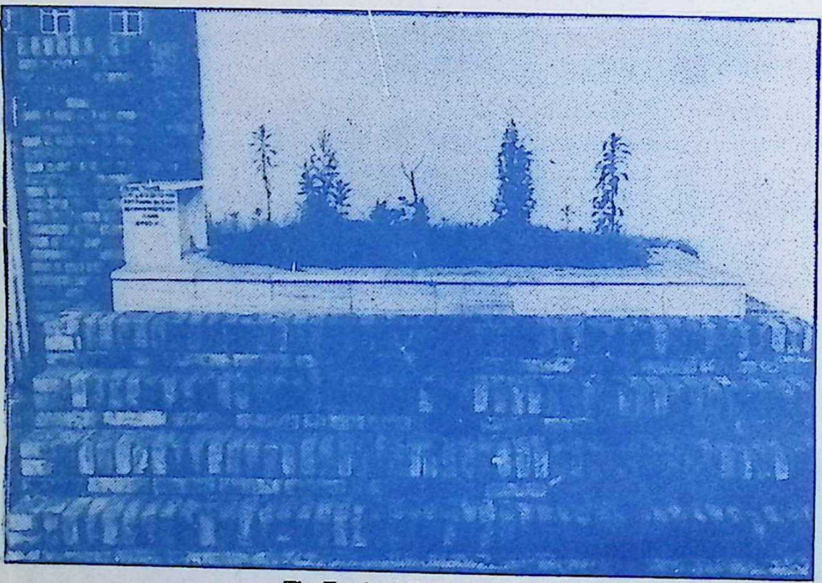
Their role it was to further scare the already perplexed animal at a closer range—twisting its tail and the like. Once the he-buffalo was sufficiently tired, the armed Bhairav would enter for dealing the *coup de grace* with his sharpened scimitar. It was a gory end for the animal, much as that of a bull in the present-day bull-fights in either Spain or Mexico.

The last Bhakku Bhairav and Buffalo spectacle one witnessed in Kathmandu was in the early 'Sixties. And the arena, for once, was the present Dasarath Rangashala (sports studium). Then came the unfortunate total ban—thereby denying not only the Kathmanduites but also the visiting tourists the opportunity, perhaps for good, of witnessing a spectacle, which, with certain civilised modifications and improvements, had in it the seeds of a major potential sport attraction in the shape of an Oriental Bull-Fight —and a unique one at that.

T.R.N. April 10, 1983



Begum Hazrat Mahal: An Untold Story



The Tomb of Hazrat Mahal

Nana Saheb Peshwa died in Nepal, says one story. Begum Hazrat Mahal was born in Nepal, says another. Both seem to have remained unsolved mysteries. "One of the unsolved mysteries of Asiatic history", wrote Percival Landon in 1928, "will always be the exact date of the death of Nana Sahib and the manner of his ending". The other one, if at all we can call it a mystery, is in respect of the birthplace of begum Hazrat Mahal, perhaps unmentioned by any historian so far.

Now, first Nana Sahib *alias* Dhandu Pant. He was a relative adopted by Baji Rao, the Peshwa of Poona, and a representative of the Maratha claim to the empire of India. During the Sepoy Mutiny—later known as the First War of Indian Independence— of 1957 AD, this rebel leader had earned the nickname "Devil Incarnate" at the hands of the British. Chased by the British from his stronghold in Kanpur, he, along with his 13-year-old wife, Kasi Bai, and the widow of Baji Rao, crossed into Nepal in December of that year.

They were received at the Nepal-India border by Kedar Narsing, a

Nepalese general, who had been specially deputed from Kathmandu for the purpose. Others who entered into Nepal along with Nana Saheb included rebel leaders like Tantia Tope, begum Hazrat Mahal, Benee Madhoo and the Raja of Gonda, Munnoo Khan. The Nepal authorities took upon themselves the reponsibility of providing shelter to the Begum of Oudh, the two wives of Bazi Rao II, the wives of Nana Saheb and Bala Rao whom they escorted to Kathmandu. Not only that; they were also given a monthly subsidy of Rs. 400 each and a residence at Thapathali.

It is alleged that Kathmandu had given asylum to the rebel leaders partly because of their immense wealth which they had brought with them from India. Of course, as could be expected, most of the jewelleries of the rebels were bought by, among others, premier Jung Bahadur. Why should he not?

But there are also instances of Nepal helping some indigent rebel leaders with free gifts of land and offers of job. Col. Lawrence, the British Resident, himself reported that 'the Nepal Durbar had conferred a *Jagheer* (free-hold land) on Surfraz Ali Khan", a rebel leader. Also "Surfraz Ali's son was given an employment in the Nepal Durbar with a pay of Rs. 200.00 a year", writes Ashad Hussain, another researcher on the subject.

The very act of providing asylum to the anti-British rebels was like tiny Nepal challenging the British Lion. But challenge she did , as eloquently put by the noted historian, Dr. Tara Chand, who writes: "The plots which were hatched in different parts of India, received encouragement from the neighbouring countries, especially Nepal...while (the Gurkhas) maintained minimum relations with the British envoy in their country". And this is corroborated by the British Resident himself: "The more I hear and see what is passing at this (Nepal) Durbar, the more convinced I am that the sympathies of the *Sardārs* and the Army are with the rebels rather than with us".

It is not, however, necessary to go into the details as to what transpired later. But while most historians believe that Nana Saheb died of *Aul* (Malaria) at Deokhuri in west Nepal as reported by Lt. Col. Ramsay, the British Resident in Kathmandu, in his letter dated October 8, 1859, it is still a matter of mystery whether it was actually Nana Saheb ***who*** had died or someone else! For, even as late as in 1895, various stories of Nana Saheb having surfaced up at this place or the other, at one time or the other, kept on circulating.

Now to turn to begum Hazrat Mahal. Most of us have seen, to this day, a tomb on the right-hand side of the entrance leading to the Information Department near Ghantaghar in Kathmandu; the tomb is believed to contain the mortal remains of Hazrat Mahal. But little do we know that this historical personality, a leader of the Indian Mutiny on her own right, had expressed the desire to "return" to Nepal not only for reasons of safety, but because she hailed from this country in the first place. This astounding revelation, though yet to be historically corroborated, appears in an article published in *"Bharatiya Nepali Bangmaya"*, a magazine coming out from Darjeeling, in its issue dated December 1980. It deserves to be quoted almost in full, and here is how it goes:

"Wazid Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Lucknow, sat on the throne in the year 1847. Given to the pleasures of life, he was very fond of dance, songs and music. Around that time, some local courtesans came across a beautiful Nepali girl in the streets of Lucknow. They took her with them, had her trained in the art of muses, and took her to the palace of Wazid Ali Shah. In the course of time, this Nepali girl rose to the status of one of the **begums** (queens) of Wazid Ali and was named begum Hazrat Mahal. That was a time when the wave of Sepoy Mutiny had been sweeping across the length and breadth of India.

"Wazid Ali, arrested by the British on February 7, 1856, was imprisoned at Metiabruz in far away Calcutta. It was then that Hazrat Mahal rose up in arms against the Britishers...

"Wazid Ali died while still under the British custody at Metiabruz on September 1, 1887 at the age of sixty eight. On his death, begum Hazrat Mahal expressed the desire to spend her last days in Nepal. Mangal Pande, the brain behind the Sepoy Mutiny, was put to the gallows on April 8, 1857. The Britishers then turned against the members of the Pande family and, whomsoever they came across, they tied him or her to the nozzle of the canon and blew up...

"Bujhawan Pande, a close relative of Mangal Pande, in collusion with the Gonda king, Devi Bak Singh, undertook the mission of reaching begum Hazrat Mahal to Nepal".

"Believe this story or not", adds the writer, "but it's true". It may well be. But one inaccuracy, in this story, is in respect of the year of the **begum's** escape into Nepal for, as far as we know, it was not in 1887 but some 30 years earlier than that. However, the question remains: was the Begum, after all, a Nepali? We hope some historians will further enlighten us in the matter ◻ *

***A slightly different, also more elaborate, version of the Hazrat Mahal story has come to my notice since. An article by one Mr. Gopal Singh Vishwa of Kanpur, India, and appearing in the 1984 Puja Supplement of "Himalchuli" Nepali daily, has the following to add (abridged):**

"Nawab Wazid Zli Shah once fell in love with one of his mother's beautiful slave-girls. This slave-girl, a Nepali, had (earlier) been bought off the Lucknow market for Rupees seven and, after having been trained as a courtesan, was resold to the Nawab's palace.

"Sometime later the Nawab suddenly fell ill... Astrologers divined his illness as having been caused by one of the 28 palace slave-girls bearing *kundalis* (an evil omen in the shape of hair-curls?) at their napes. ..and suggested such signs be done away with. Most of the slave-girls, save the Nepali one, fled the palace out of fear. .. The nape of Hazrat Mahal's neck was branded with red-hot iron rods, but she suffered the resultant pain with surprising equanimity. Wazid Ali was so impressed with her as to fall in love, and, braving his mother's protestations, married her. Soon she bore him a son who was named Birjis Kadir (Quadr?).

"...When the Nawab was taken into British custody on February 7, 1856 and later removed to Calcutta as a war-prisoner, Begum Hazrat was among the very few not to lose their cool. She not only stood her ground but also mobilised all her subjects into an army in order to fight the British invaders of Awadh —thereby earning for herself great acclaim as one of the foremost leaders of India's First War of Independence.

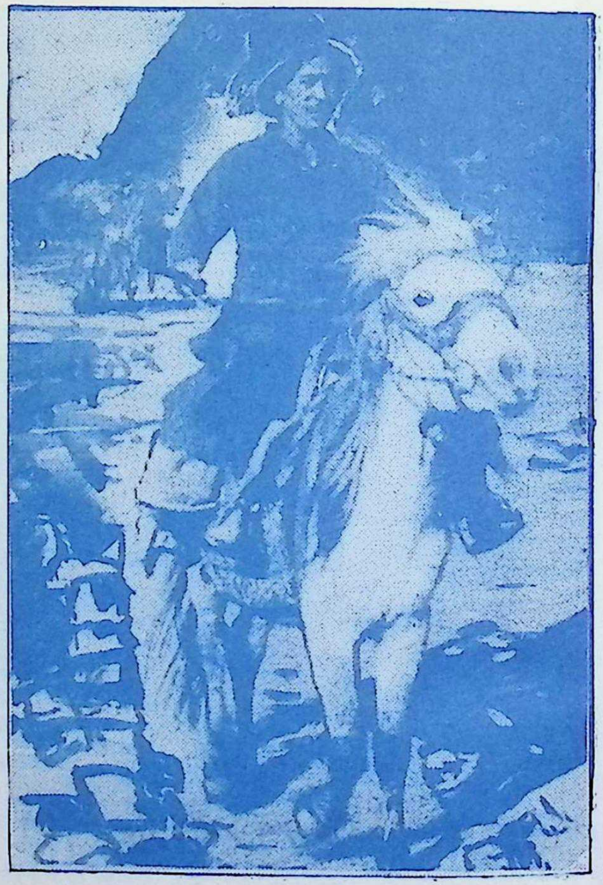
"On the 5th of July 1857, she also enthroned her son, Birjis, as the Nawab.

"...The war waged in order to shake off the British yoke continued till February 1858. ..But this prolonged struggle had sapped the vitality both of the begum and her subjects. ..Ultimately she had perforce to leave her Kesarbagh palace and to seek refuge in Muhammadabad (March 16, 1858).

"But Sir Colin Campbell would not let the queen escape unharmed and trailed her wherever she went. ..At long last, she and Birjis were safely escorted to Nepal by (rebel-leaders like) Bujhawan Pandey and the king of Gonda, Devi Baksh. ..

"The begum breathed her last at a place called Nuwakot in Nepal on April 7, 1879."

Horse Racing, Mustang Style



How the word 'Mustang' came to mean a 'horse' as far west as in the Americas is beyond my comprehension. To us in Nepal, too, the word 'Mustang' conjures up memories of horses, of horse-riding, and horse-racing—often of the bare-back variety !

Some years back, a fine day in Bhadau found me at above 9000 feet in the Jomosom area, in Nepal's remote Mustang district. I stood there, with a friend, watching some boys readying two horses for us to ride upto the Muktinath and back. To the south, the towering snows of the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri ranges glistened in the sun, while ahead of us rose the sheer vertical steepness of the ridge that we had to skirt on way to Kagbeni, and on to Muktinath peak. It was cold at sunrise, for the sun only grazed the tips of the steep ridges around us.

While a peak is by definition the highest point of a given area, the shrine of Muktinath itself is situated slightly lower—at 12,000 feet. A steep goat-track led us above a deep vertical gorge, below which the Kali Gandaki river (Tibetan name: "Tsangpo" or "The Clear One") roared past. Looking across the gorge and the expansive, mountainous desert land, we could only see some tiny, scattered, thorny, leafless bushes. This vista was in complete contrast to areas south of the Annapurna ranges like, for instance, the Ghodepani crest that we had seen earlier and that boasted of countless verieties of rhododendron and other trees whose pink trunks were veiled in moss and whose branches supported dozens of white and dark-blue orchids besides different strains of grass, moss and ferns.

For more than three days, from Tatopani onwards, we had crossed and re-crossed, skirted or waded across the Kali Gandaki. At other times we had simply marvelled at the "deepest gorge in the world"—a gorge said to be far deeper and more impressive than that of the one-mile-deep Grand Canyon, for, in parts, it (the Kali Gandaki gorge) is fully "three miles deep". But once we were at Muktinath, the Kali Gandaki was so small indeed that we could easily jump across it. and wondered again if it was the same river that formed the "world's deepest gorge".

We were now in the very heart of the Muktinath area, and the climate here was a good deal cooler than either at Jomosom (incidentally, meaning a "frontier fort" in Tibetan) or at Kagbeni. Also, we were safe, in the sense that we were beyond the pale of the howling and pebble-kicking gale that had almost chased us all along the river-trail. No more were we obliged to hug the steep rocky riverbanks to find shelter from the whistling wind that swept up the gorge, every day.

Once we were through with our visit to the Muktinath shrine, called *Chu-Miq-Rgat-Sa-Gye* (the "108 Spring-spouts"), we witnessed preparations afoot for the most popular "Summer Festival of Great Men" (that is what, we were told, the *Pompo Yartung* meant) jointly organised by the nobles of Puran, Luprak and Jharkot, with the villagers of Kagbeni, quite some distance away, reportedly joining the festival every alternate year. The year that we were in Mustang happened to be the *minus*-Kagbeni one.

Caravans of colourful people, dressed in Tibetan fineries and *Chubas*, had started arriving—the men on horseback and the women on foot. Tents had been pitched around the rest-house next to the Ningma gompa, some to serve as lodges and others as restaurants. Local delicacies were galore with a profusion of *Chhang* and *Arak*.

The broad road-like open space, some 35 feet wide and ten times as long, stretching in front of the rest-house, served as the 'race-course'. The race was on soon after the Jharkot chiefs had arrived and sportive expertise in horse-riding, often bareback, was in full evidence as sturdy Mustang youngsters gallopped to and fro at fastest possible speeds.

The principal attraction of the festival appeared to lie in testing the horse-riders' skill in picking up, while still atop galloping horses, medieval Knights-style, odd bits of articles like coins and *Khaadaas* (the ceremonial white Tibetan scarves) off the ground. We were given to understand that the Khaadaas, placed at various places along the route, contained money put in as 'stakes' by the spectators. It was a sheer marvel to witness some of the riders, apparently as drunk as can be, gallop past the stake at breakneck speed, while, at the same time, trying to lift the Khaadaas off the ground with one hand outstretched for the purpose. Loosing one's balance in the process and falling off the horse-back could mean a physical disaster!

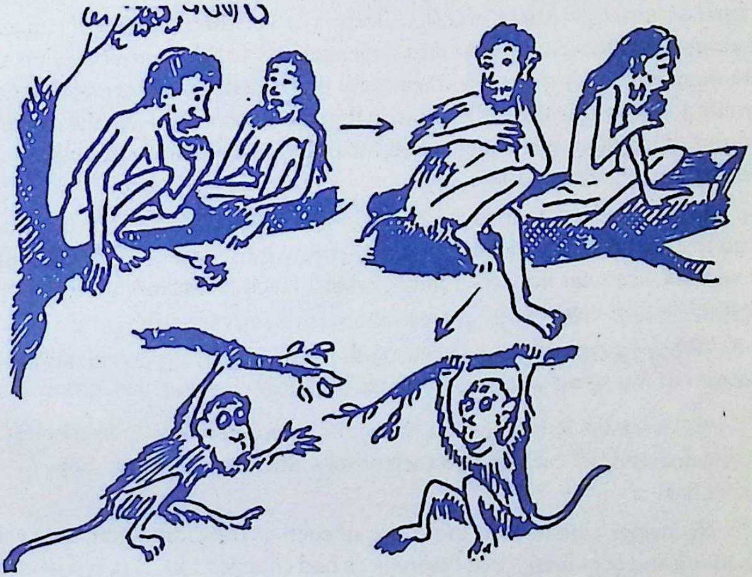
The spectators applauded with gay abandon every time a rider succeeded in his herculean effort. It was also not unusual to see the panting and perspiring mounts, with flaring nostrils, suddenly go berserk and rush like mad at the surrounding, shouting and clapping crowds, scaring them out of their wits and making them run helter-skelter for cover in the process!

The climax of the festival was known as the *Drazur*—a dance in which the nobles of Jharkot (i.e., the Pompos), those of Luprak and the Pohyog (or the commoners) participated in a wide-circle formation. In the centre stood a man, as colourfully attired as the others (*bakhu*, boots and hat) and holding a long spear. The drums beat, the horns blew and the crowds shouted as the men, each holding a whip, danced around him in a slow, rhythmic movement. At intervals they rushed towards the central figure, simultaneously striking his hand-held spear with cracking whips. At the final closing-in rush, they lifted the spear-wielding man off the ground. This, it was said, was a gesture of solidarity amongst the representing villages, the person so lifted being a Jharkot 'royal' priest of old times and the spear he held representing the Jharkot ancestral deity, the *Abse Dungsara*.

It was almost dusk when we, enthralled and exhilarated at the day's proceedings, wended our way back to Kagbeni for a night halt. But the wild horse-racing was still on even as darkness descended. The crowds would disperse only the next morning, we were told.

TRN October 12, 1984

Evolution In Reverse!



Near the mythical *Shleshmaantak* forest, the site in which the monkey-infested Pashupatinath and Guhyeshwari temples are located today, a skinny couple lived in the days of pre-history. There never was a more skinny old man and his wife was no better. But the monkey tribe, believed by science to be the predecessors of humankind, was not yet even born on earth!

The emaciated man and woman stole into a nearby village one day and made a quick job of any booty they could lay their hands on. The villagers, coming to know of the thieves, chased them out of the village and deep into the Shleshmaantak forest. At last, in sheer desperation, the couple climbed up a tall tree.

"Return the money you have stolen", shouted the villagers who had gathered at the foot of the tree, "or we shall not let you come down."

Not only that. The villagers took turns in keeping up the vigil and, in order not to let the 'thief-couple' come down from the tree, even built huts at its bottom and camped there.

Time went by. The skinny old couple found plenty of fruits in the tree and faced no problem of food. Once they ran out of the fruits, they lived on succulent new leaves and sprouts. After that, they turned to the barks, but weren't too happy eating them.

As it is, they were extremely scrawny. Living on bitter and tough barks left them no more than bones and skin. They couldn't sleep because of hunger, and their eyeballs receded deeper into their sockets. At the same time, with all that chewing and biting the barks, their teeth protruded out and grew longer, more pointed. The longer they stayed out in the open, fighting against the elements of nature, their skins got tougher and their nails grew long and claw-like. Their bodies shrank further too!

As the cold weather set in, the old man even saw his wife getting covered with thicker and ever thicker hair. The same was the case with himself, but only it was his wife who noticed it first—longish black hairs were growing all over their skinny bodies!

"Why, I even get a queer feeling that something is growing out from the bottom of my spine", said the husband, in utter surprise.

"I have a tingling sensation *there*, too", replied the wife. And before long they witnessed the curious spectacle of tails sticking out from between their haunches!

No longer able to bear the shock of such a transformation, they started shouting and screaming. But their voices had changed too, and, not words, but mere squeaks were coming instead! To the utter astonishment of themselves as also the villagers down below, what escaped their mouths were not understandable at all!

They recovered from the shock soon enough, however, and were seen jumping from one branch to another with the help of their long nails and claws, ——and tails. Swinging from one tree to another, they soon went out of sight of the villagers, dropping the money bag in the process. The villagers, contented at last at their long vigil having come to an end, collected the money and proceeded homewards.

In the meanwhile, the lantern-faced shrunken couple made the trees their home and even started begetting children. In no time, the forest was filled with creatures of their kinds, all swinging and jumping in the trees, chattering and squeaking like monkeys.

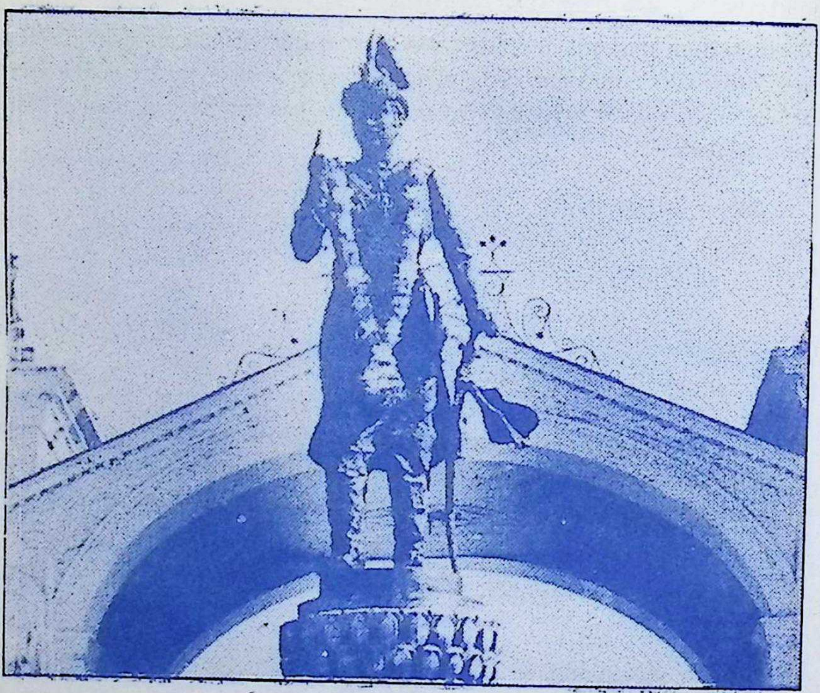
Like monkeys, I say? No, they had turned into monkeys, actual four-footeds! The skinny couple did recall, however, that one time they too had been human beings, living in huts on the ground. And, often enough, they used to come down from the trees to the ground, mix with the people, steal the offerings brought to the temples, and, when chased by people, scamper off to their tree-safe hideouts!

It is thus that the monkeys were born out of human beings. Never, therefore, make a mistake, dear readers, and be beguiled by the gibberish that Darwin or whoever may have told you. No, Ape was *not* the forefather of Man. It was *vice-versa*!

TRN October 11, 1983

(PS: A reader, an American conservationist at that, was seemingly outraged at going through this piece, and, when he met me next, said he would make a complaint to the Darwin Foundation. I hope he did!)

A Social *Coup D'etat*



A Statue of HM King Prithvi Narayan Shah

You know how the term "coup" has been so bloody politically-tinted these days as to denote nothing but a swift, overnight turning of tables in the power game. Yet, the dictionary meaning of this word simply is: "A brilliantly executed stratagem: a master stroke."

I am using the term here to denote a social revolution of a kind that did turn the table against all bigwigs and in favour of the socially ostracized slaves, almost overnight. A single stroke of statesmanship, masterminded by one individual, altered the entire social power structure in Nepal. And, that too, at a time when many other Asian and African countries hadn't even dreamt of such drastic steps in the field of social reforms.

The date was 24th of November, 1924 A.D., some sixty years ago from today. Advanced western countries like Britain and America had come out with legislations abolishing the social evil of slavery in 1838 and in 1862 respectively. The League of Nations, set up, as we all know, after the World War I (1914-18), was still crying hoarse urging its member-countries to do away with this evil system. Why, some Middle-east countries like Muscat and Oman abolished slavery only as late as the other day, in 1970— a full forty-five years after Nepal had done it.

Going slightly back into history, we can trace the beginnings of Nepal's desire to do away with slavery back to 1773 AD, more than sixty years before Great Britain abolished it . At the time, king Prithivi Narayan Shah had issued an edict banning this social evil. Similar efforts were made later by premier Bhimsen Thapa (in 1824) and by king Rajendra Bikram Shah (in 1839). But Nepal's well-entrenched conservative coteries had scuttled these moves before they could take any effective shape.

Then came premier Jung Bahadur. He also enacted a legislation which declared, in effect, that the slaves who had escaped out of the clutches of their masters and had settled in areas of Morang and the 'New Territorries' would be automatically treated as having been "emancipated". He also laid down that the purchase of Indians as slaves would be treated as illegal and persons so engaged in the slave-trade would be punished under the law. But his efforts came to a naught against the backdrop of the same social and political opposition. So did those of premier Deva Shumsher after him, though he did provide an example by releasing his own private slaves, besides enacting yet another legislation banning the slave-trade.

Daniel Wright estimated the population of slaves in Nepal those days at about 30,000 persons. And the majority of them, it is said, belonged to the Bihar and U.P. areas in north India, particularly those that had migrated to Nepal in the wake of the great Indian famine of 1924. The market price of a slave varied from Rs. 390 to 500, the young and pretty-looking girls fetching the highest price!

Sardar Bhim Bahadur Pandey, while dealing with the subject in one of his erudite essays, credits premier Chandra Shumsher, who ultimately succeeded in abolishing slavery, with having "spent money from his own pocket" in order to "buy off" the freedom of the slaves. Argues he: "Unlike the present, all the unspent state funds those days used to go to the pockets of the prime minister. Looked at from this point of view, the sum of Rupees fourteen lakhs spent by Chandra Shumsher for the purpose could be said to have been his personal money."

But though Sardar Pandey puts the amount involved in paying compensation at Rupees 14 lakhs only, other accounts, apparently more authentic, put the amount spent for the purpose at Rs. 36 lakhs. And this amount, if true, was quite a staggering figure, considering both the value of money and also the state of Nepal's economy at the time. For, computed at today's prices, the amount would multiply itself to mean no less than Rupees fifty crores (500,000,000) approximately! What's more, even in these days it is rare indeed to see this much money being allotted to a single social-service Budget-head in any one year.

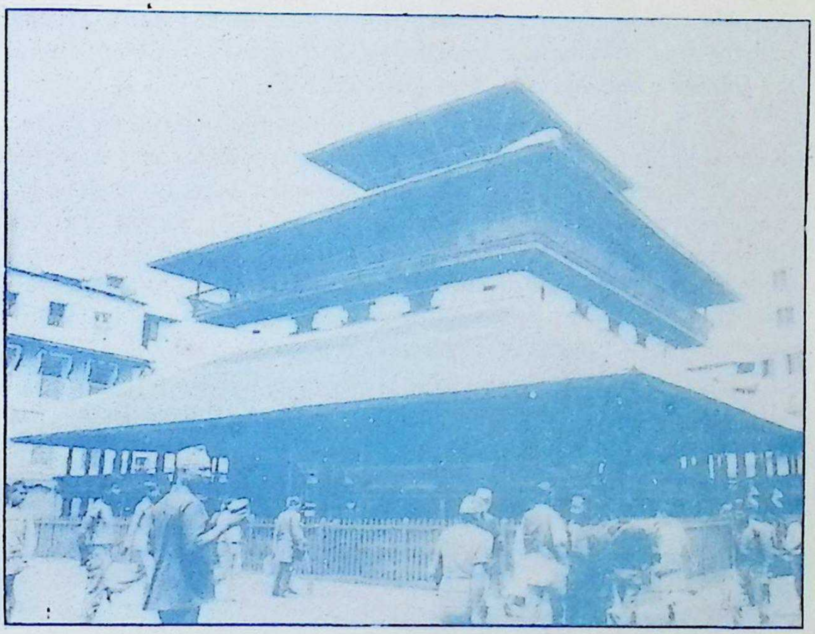
Also, we must not forget that Nepal's annual state revenue did barely exceed Rs.200 crores at the time. Looked at from this point of view, spending nearly one-fourth of the State's entire annual earnings for the slavery-abolition programme of a "dubious benefit" (at least in the eyes of the premier's opponents) was not short of a "revolution"— and must have been opposed tooth and nail. But Chandra Shumsher stood his ground, went through his grand scheme, and deserved posterity's plaudits for doing so.

No wonder, the public declaration of his historic and courageous step had to be buttressed with as many arguments as premier Chandra Shumsher could muster in its favour. No wonder, too, that these arguments ran into fifty-seven pages which were read out, both in Nepali and in English versions, from the famous (but also non-existent, anymore!) tree, *Khariko Bot*, at Kathmandu's Tundikhel. Interestingly enough, the English version was seemingly for the benefit of just three foreigners present on the occasion—the British Resident, his physician and one Mr. Kilburn!

"Shiva Bhaktas" (devotees of Lord Shiva) or Shivabhaktis was the new name given to the 59,873 slaves thus emancipated by Chandra Shumshere on the Nepali New Year's Day in 1925. Some people hold that an amount of Rs. 14 lakhs out of the total fund needed for the purpose was "drawn" from the 'private' coffers of Pasupatinath temple—hence this name. But few today are known as either "Shiva Bhaktas" or "Shiva Bhaktis", most of the emancipated slaves having adopted various family names such as the Gharti Magars, Ghartis or Khawases and the like, and, as such, having merged into the mainstream of the wider Nepalese society.

T.R.N. November 22, 1983

The Name-Game!



Did you know that the present-day Nepal valley was known as "Bhaayul", Deopatan as 'Kanchi', Lalitpur as Lalit Pattan or Ashoka Pattan, Kirtipur as *Thencho Gram*, Banepa as "Bandipur" and the Swayambhu hillock as "Gopuchhe" in earlier days?

That the word Kathmandu itself has been derived from *Kastha Mandap* is too well-known a story to deserve repetition here. What needs to be clarified in this context, however, is that the credit for constructing the Kastha Mandap (otherwise also known as Maru Sattal or the 'Rest House at Maru') around which the legend of Kathmandu has been built, has been wrongly placed.

Contrary to popular belief, which ascribes its construction to a 17th century king, Narasimha Malla, this edifice finds mention even in an eleventh century Mss entitled "Nama Sangiti" and, a century later, another verse-composition is said to have categorically recorded that "Janarakshita (i.e., the Buddha) resided here". These records, therefore, push back the antiquity of Kastha Mandap by many a century more.

It may also be mentioned, in passing, that Kathmandu was also known, at different times of history, by such names as *Kali Daha* (Black-water Lake), and *Naga Daha* or *Naga Hrad* (Lake of Serpents), both of which obviously refer to the area having been water-filled, a fact which has since found geological and scientific corroboration. Also, the legend of sage Manjushree, who is credited with the draining of the lake-water and establishing civilisation here, is borne out by another name, *Manju Pattan,* given to it.

The local Newars, who are a dominant majority in the valley, still refer to Kathmandu as *Yan*, presumably an abbreviation of its old-time names such as Yangal or Yambu. That this city originally owed it existence to some ancient migratory community such as the Koliyas or the Kiratas can also be conjectured on the basis of some Lichchhavi records which are said to refer to two separate principalities—namely, *Kolligram north (or Yambu proper) and Kolligram* south (or Yangwal). The Chinese Blue Annals have also made reference to both these principalities, it is averred.

Another tradition has it that Kathmandu city of the old was divided into three separate zones or areas, with the upper (or northern) part being known as *Thon*, the middle part (between the present-day Asan and Makhan) as *Dathu* and the lower part, south of Hanuman Dhoka, as Kwon. Kantipur is yet another name given to it in more present times as is evidenced in, among other things, the writings of Bhanubhakta, popularly known as the father of Nepali literature (19 century).

Now let's turn to Patan, another sister-city in the valley. Currently known, in administrative parlance, as Lalitpur, and believed to be a derivative of *Lalitaranya* (an ancient forest) by some, and as a legacy of a legendary 'founding' farmer, Lalit Jyapu, by others, its older name was Lalit Pattan, afterwards abbreviated as Patan. Another ancient name given to it was *Yupagram* (in the Lichchhavi period), while the popular Newari name *Yala* by which it is referred to by the locals, points out to its possible association, as a capital, with the Kiratis, the most ancient historically known rulers of the Kathmandu valley. The word Yala itself, in its turn,could be an abbreviation of Yalambar, one of the more notable Kirati kings (3rd century A.D.), who may have laid the foundations of this city.

Bhadgaon or Bhaktapur (literally, 'The City Of Devotees'), in its turn, is known in local parlance as *Khwapu*. Knowledgeable sources aver that this is a derivative of Khopring, itself again a possible Kirati word, though few have been able to explain the exact meaning of this term.

Slightly beyond the ancient Bhaktapur principality lies another better-known settlement, Banepa, known in earlier times a Bhonta (or Bhotay?) in

Newari. One explanatin given to this term is that it denoted a major stop-over and supply centre for travellers and caravans passing to and from Kathmandu and Tibet (also known, to the majority of Nepalese, as "Bhot").

Similar explanation is given to the term Sankhu, yet another township to the north of Kathmandu, from where also caravans used to take off for Tibet. The prefix "Saa", it is said, stands for Tibet. Both these townships, it is also held, could have been named after the many mongoloid settlers in the northern high-hill Nepal belt, including the Kiratis, who are sometimes referred to by the Kathmanduites as Parbatays or Bhotays, thus possibly indicating that both Banepa and Sankhu used to be the stronghold of non-Newar, high-hill,tribes till late in history.

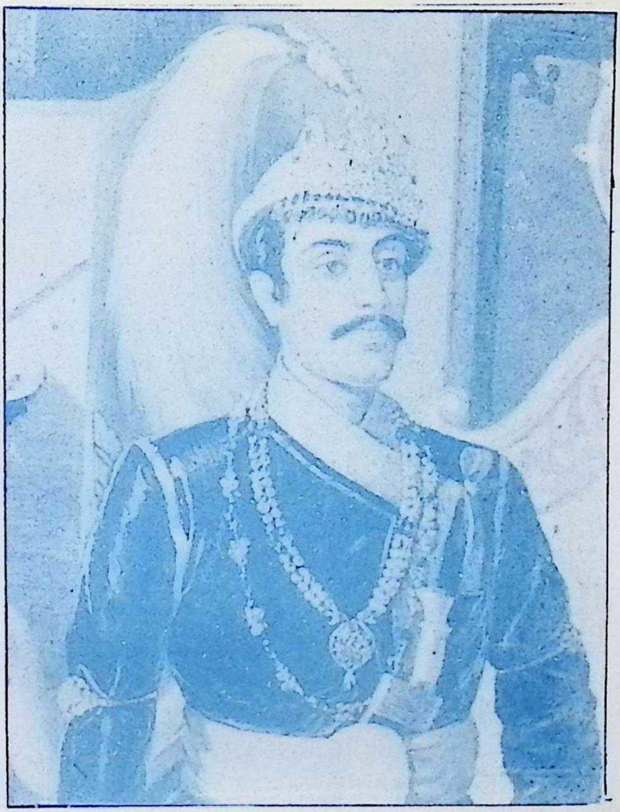
If the Kastha Mandap (literally, a 'Wooden Shrine or Holy Platform)', a 66-feet square by 65.4 feet high shrine-cum-rest house at the heart of Kathmandu, was built out of the timber of a single tree, Kirtipur, another of the earliest fortified settlements in the valley and a separate principality till as late as the Malla rule, was, in its turn, believed to have been originally built out of the stone of a single boulder! But, unlike that of Kathmandu, the ancient names given to Kirtipur do not go to support the contention of its being the product of a 'single boulder'. On the other hand, the terms *Padma Kastha Puri* ("City of Lotus Timber") or *Madhyam Kastha Giri* (Middle Hill of Wooden Timber?), as it was said to be known in ancient days, clearly indicate its origin as a 'timber-city' rather than a boulder-born one; and, of course, anyone who has seen the modern-day Kirtipur will easily testify that this could be so. It was also known in earlier days as Bar Gad, possibly meaning a fortified citadel.

Another very ancient pilgrimage centre in the Kathmandu valley, known for, among other things, some rare inscriptions dating back to the Lichhavi times, is the Changu Narayan near Sankhu. This shrine, it is said, was referred to in earlier days as the "Dola Sikhara Swami" (or the 'Lord of the Dola Hill-top') and also Champaka Narayan. The first name obviously refers to the 1540 m. high Dolagiri or Doladri hillock after which the Sankhu settlement was also said to be known, and the second to the fact that it was possibly built out of *Champak* timber.

Lastly, the famous "Buddhist Sphinx" or Bodhnath temple is perhaps the single most multi-epitheted monument in the Kathmandu valley. Said to have been originally built by king Shiva Deva, a Lichchhavi king, it must have been rebuilt or renovated upteenth number of times. While romantic nick-names such as the "Temple of Dew Drops" have their own legendary backing behind them, some other names that have been given to it at different times or by different communities include Khasti or Khasho Chaitya, Mahakal Chaitya, Khash Chibaha, Khaso Tirtha, Jhyamung Khasgor Chhorten, Thasu Cheen and, of course, Bauddha!

And how about "Bhaayul"? Many a Tibetan record, it is said, has often referred to Nepal as *Bhaayul* (possibly meaning the Land of Garuda) and Bhutan as "Druk-Yul" or the Dragon-country!□

TRN, March 29, 1985



Divorce, Nepali - Style

Divorce, it is often claimed, is a Western innovation. It may, therefore, come as a news to many that Nepal not only has some of the world's simplest traditional divorce-procedures, but also that some such procedures had actually been *codified into a law* at least as far back as a hundred and thirty years ago! King Surendra Bikram Shah's *Muluki Ain* (Legal Code), 1853 AD, is an instance in point. But more about it later.

The common word for divorce in Nepal is *paar paachuke,* or simply *paachuke.* Some hill communities also call it *Sinko-paango,*which perhaps indicates that a divorce can be as simple as snapping a *Sinko* or a tiny twig! Amongst the Limbus of eastern Nepal, divorce from the husband's side is known as *Khemjong* and that from the wife's as *Naajong.* Many other communities like the Newars, Gurungs, Sherpas and Tamangs also take a couple's right to obtain divorce for granted, and not much fuss is made over it. Amongst the Terai people, the Satars are particularly known for securing a divorce by simply making a token payment known as *pon*, or price. A satar wife, for instance,.can return an amount equivalent to the *pon* she may have recieved from the groom at the time of wedding. In case the initiative for divorce comes from the husband's side, he has to pay the wife double the *pon* amount. It's as simple as that!

Even simpler, in the sense that it involves no financial burden, is the Newari custom. A Newar wife, for instance, can customarily walk out of a wedlock by simply slipping, under her husband's pillow, some split betel-nuts and sullking away from his house! Is it not as simple as, if not simpler than, uttering the word "Talaak" thrice under the Muslim law? What is even more remarkable is that a Newar husband, in his turn, doesn't seem to enjoy a similar privilege!

What has thus been an ancient tradition—how much ancient it is difficult to determine— recieved a legal recognition, as mentioned above, in the year 1853. There are nine different clauses enshrined in the Legal Code made in that year, and an off-the-cuff translation—or rather a summarisation—of these provisions makes an interesting reading. Here they are:

a) If a Newar woman, on being left at home for long periods by her husband without making adequate arrangement for her upkeep during the period of his absence, or on her being made to stay at her parental home for three years after marriage, or on her being left behind when he opts for settlement elsewhere, lodges a complaint to the effect that she no longer wants to remain his wife, the concerned authority *shall grant her a divorce* forthwith!

b) Likewise, if a Newar woman, on being left alone by her husband who is convicted of a crime and is fleeing from the law as a result, comes to the court and expresses a desire that she no longer wants to remain his wife, she *shall be granted a divorce;*

c) In the event of a Newar husband "keeping" another woman in addition to the legally married one, or on his driving the latter from his residence or neglecting her as a consequence of his being enamoured of a prostitute, the concerned court, on receiving the wife's complaint to the effect, *shall grant her a divorce;*

d) If a Newar husband becomes a fakir (ascetic) or "loses his caste", no divorce proceedings are even called for and the woman's parents can have her married elsewhere *without inviting criminal punishment* for so doing;

e) If a Newar wife complains that her husband is the victim of an incurable disease, or is lame, dumb, blind or otherwise impotent, the concerned court *shall grant her a divorce;* the husband cannot force her to live with him *against her will;*

d) A Newar married woman shall not "return the betelnuts" and walk out of a wedlock simply on the ground that her husband is seriously ill; nor shall a Newar husband be granted a divorce on the mere gound that his wife is under the "cast of evil stars"; the "returning of betelnuts" by a wife during her husband's illness shall be nullified by law and the concerned court shall return her to the custody of the said husband;

g) The "*sastur*" (court fee) payable by a Newar woman on her being granted a divorce on the aforesaid grounds "shall be Rupee One; no larger amount shall be charged," etc.

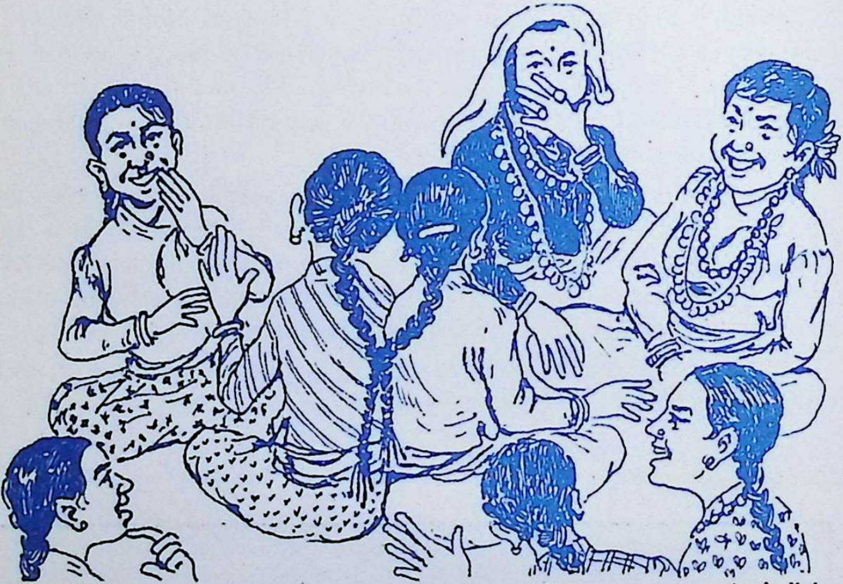
Were we to compare the progressive liberalism of our forbears as reflected in the above and such other provisions, I feel like laughing at the mess we have made of ourselves today in the name of education and advancement, Western-style! No one, except a prude, can help admire such liberalism and farsightedness of our predecessors.

Not only that. The Newar ancients, particularly, also invented and developed suitable social institutions that guaranteed, right from the beginning, a young man or woman's inherent right to freedom in matters such as divorce. The well-known institution of "Ihi" is an instance in point. I hope I don't have to describe this Newari custom, beautiful as it is, in this essay once again.

Must we, therefore, continue to suffer from a 'backwardness' complex in every sphere of life? I dare say no!

TRN December 6, 1983

'Mityaari': A Unique Institution



To say that ours is a culture which imparts divinity to every single living being is an understatement. In fact, our ancestors, who were little aware that trees or plants had a 'life' in the modern sense of the term, nevertheless saw divinity in them too, as is evident in their tree-worship and other rituals.

The *Bar* (Banyan) tree was, for them, the incarnation of Vishnu; so was *tulsi* or the Basil plant. The *Peepul* tree, in its turn, was an incarnation of Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth. Why, even inaminate things like stones didn't fail to receive their share of worship or oblations

The concept of the *Aatmaa*, when it meant the 'self', resulted in worshipping one's own body, as highlighted in rituals like the Newari *Mha Pujaa*. and, the same term, used in a broader sense as the 'soul', would regard even the minutest form of life, such as an insect, as a divine being, worthy of respect—nay, of outright worship too!

No wonder, therefore, that the Nepalese see divine virtue even in the simple act of striking a friendship—and make a religious ritual out of it. A ritual friendship so established is known as the *Mityaari* and the person with whom this relationship is struck is known as the *Mit*. By extension, the parents of the mit are, not unlike one's own parents, known as *Mit Babu* and Mit Amaa, (meaning *Mit* father and *Mit* mother respectively), the ritual friend's elder brother is a *Mit Dai* and his or her younger sister is a *Mit Bahini*, etc. And so on its goes.

A *Mit* is also known as a *Saina*, particularly when a ritual friendship is established between women or girls. In the villages, where the *Mityaari* relationship is common, a man or woman can have as many *Mits* and *Mitinis* (female Mits) as one would like or could afford to have.

I have used the term 'afford' with a precise purpose. For, establishing a *Mityaari* friendship isn't just a matter of striking acquaintance or intimacy. It is much more than that and calls for a religious ritual, a celebration, a feast and exchange of gifts!

If two persons, often of the same age and sex, decide to become one another's *Mit*, they go through most of the processes that are called for in organising a holy ceremony like a *Pujaa*. Other friends and relatives are asked to join the celebration; a goat, a chicken or a duck is sacrified; and delicacies distributed amongst all of those present. Some gifts are also exchanged as mementoes. And, much like in a wedlock, the tail-ends of one another's garments may be tied into a ritual knot, while, if *Mityaari* is established between women, the long tresses of their hairs are joined together to form a common plait, as a part of the ceremonial ritual.

Establishing a *Mityaari* is not without its obligations too. One may not, for instance, address one's *Mit* by name. The death of a *Mit* calls for a ritual mourning, much as one would mourn a death in the family. If one's custom calls for the touching of a parent's feet in salutation, a *Mit*-parent may not be treated differently either.

The uninitiated may not immediately realise how utterly significant this otherwise simple ritual of 'touching the feet' is. The rural Nepalese community is highly caste-comparmentalised into the *Taagaadharis*, the *Matawaalis*, the *Achhuts* and the like. The first-named are the wearers of the holy threads and form the highest strata of society—they cannot even sit on the same table with the latter categories when it comes to partaking of food such as rice. And the last-named, the so-called 'untouchables', are even expected to side-step along a trail when they accost the higher-echelon Hindus lest they come into physical contact and 'pollute' the latter!

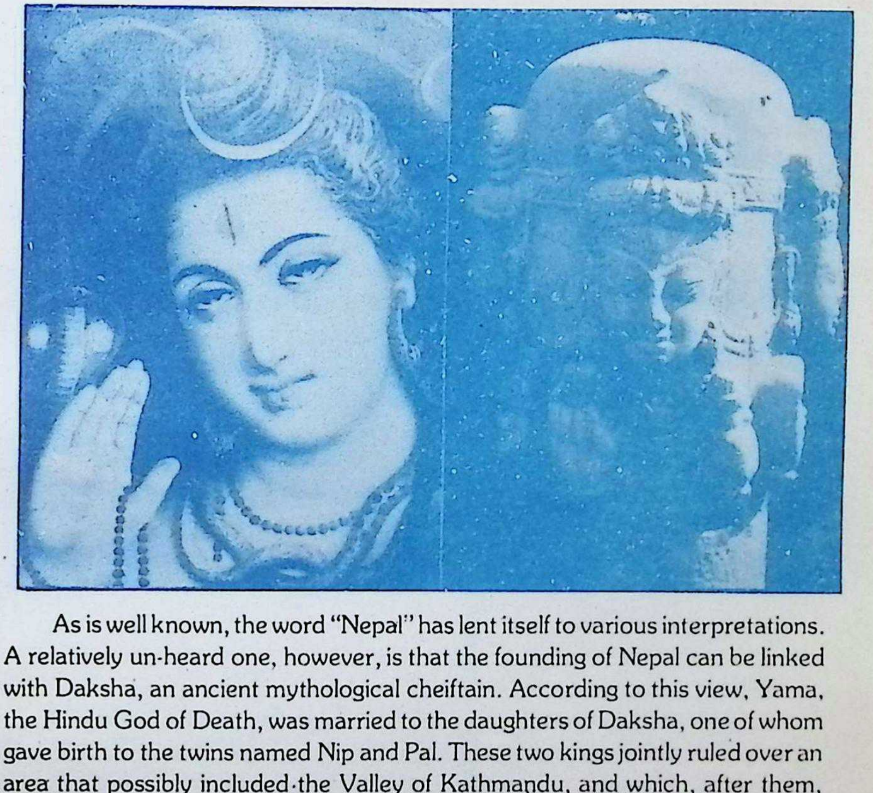
Seen against this orthodox social backdrop, the institution of the *Mityaari* must be regarded not only as a 'great leveller' or 'unifier'. For, a *Mit* need not belong to one's own caste or social strata. A *Bahun* (priest class) youth can strike a *Mityaari* with a *Matawaali* (the liquor-drinking, and , by implication, a lower caste) counterpart on almost 'equal' terms. The concept of the *Mityaari*, therefore, is nothing short of revolutionary!

This institution is also 'nationalistic' in the sense that it is, as a rule, limited to the Nepalese alone. One hardly hears a Nepalese hillman entering into *Mityaari* relationship with, say, a non-Nepalese, or, for that matter, with another non-hillman.

That the *Mityaari* has come in handy in commercial and even diplomatic relationships is evident. In the Nepalese countryside, for instance, it is not unusual to find a tradesman building up his 'empire' based on *Mityaari* contacts with more than one local bigwig or influence-peddler at a time. And, in politics, king Prithvi Narayan Shah, Nepal's great unifier, had a *Mit* in the person of king Ranjit Malla of Bhadgaon that helped smooth his conquest right upto the Kuti pass, the northern limits of the then Bhadgaon 'empire' One can imagine that the history of Nepal wouldn't have been what it is, but for the bond of intimacy provided by Prithvi Narayan's statesmanlike *Mityaari* with the Bhadgaon royal household! ◻

TRN October 19, 1984

Of Phallus Worship



As is well known, the word "Nepal" has lent itself to various interpretations. A relatively un-heard one, however, is that the founding of Nepal can be linked with Daksha, an ancient mythological cheiftain. According to this view, Yama, the Hindu God of Death, was married to the daughters of Daksha, one of whom gave birth to the twins named Nip and Pal. These two kings jointly ruled over an area that possibly included the Valley of Kathmandu, and which, after them, was named Nip-pal or Nepal. While this goes counter to the other and more widely held view that Nepal got its name from a mythological sage, Ne Muni, there is no evidence to back either and, as such, we can at best treat them as mere conjectures, except to add that the Nip-Pal connection finds mention in the works of some noted historians also.

Interestingly enough, the same Yama is also represented at times as anti-gods, that is, anti-Aryans. And, when it is said that Rudra (later Lord Shiva or Mahadeva of the Hindu pantheon) was the second son of Yama and his wife Basu, it is easy to see why Rudra also was initialy opposed to the philosophy of the Aryans. As a protector of the local people, such as the Nagas, he is said to have been derided by the Aryans as anti -Vedas and the story of Daksha having been killed at the hands of Shiva's *ganas* is symbolic in this context. Daksha Prajapati, as the story goes, invited all the Gods to a *Yagna* sacrifice he had organised. When Sati, a daughter of Daksha and the first wife of Shiva, asked her father why her husband had not been invited, Daksha is said to have used abusive words against Shiva, calling him "anti-Gods", among other things. Sati, unable to bear the insult of her husband in public, immolated herself in the sacrificial fire. This incident so infuriated Shiva that he avenged his insult, as also the death of his wife, by butchering Daksha at the very spot, That he subsequently married Parvati, the daughter of a Himalayan chieftain (possibly another non-Aryan) is symbolic too.

One wonders, also, whether Rudra was the name of one person at all. That is, could this, on the other hand, be a generic name as implied by expressions such as "Sata Rudra" (a Hundred Rudras) in Yajur Veda?. Other texts have also named at least eleven Rudras. Rudra images, it is said, have been discovered in Harappa and Moherjodaro, while Satapatha Brahmana, another text, holds that "all the gods of the outlying areas" were known as Rudras, like, for instance, the son of Prajapati and Usha Devi. Whatever their number and variety, however, they were perhaps opponents of the Aryan "Gods" and many non-Aryan heroes, like Ravana, sought Rudra's blessings in their war against the former

That Lord Shiva is to this day regarded as the "Destroyer" amongst the Holy Hindu Trinity is also symbolic in this context. "Shiva was not only a non-Aryan deity, but also a pre-Aryan -- most probably a Dravidian, or the deity of the mighty Kirats", notes the well - known scholar of Nepalese history and culture, Dhoosyan Sayami, in his treatise,"The Lotus and the Flame", a HMG Department of Information publication. Ancient Hindu scriptures are replete with instances of continuous power-struggle between the invading, "exotic" Aryans and the indigenous non-Aryans like the Kiratas. It goes without saying that the terrible "Rudra" wrecked havoc many a time on the Aryans, which explains not only the epithet of a "Destroyer" as given to him, but also his various terrifying "Bhairava" aspects, so famillиar till this day in Nepal.

The worship of this great God of the Himalayas -- some people even refer to him as an "Adam" of the Kirat people--in the "Linga" (phallic) representation is also indigenous to the orient, according to many of today's scholars. To quote Sayami once again: ... "scholars have tried to prove that the earliest reference to phallus worship can be traced among the Greeks. But the abundance of *Lingas* in the Indus Valley civilisation suggest with certitude that it was Asia which gave the world the phallic cult". (ibid, pp. 113). Even granting that the Greeks were familiar with a form of phallus worship in their heyday around the 6th century B.C., it is common knowledge that the Indus Valley civilisation flourished some 3000 years before Christ. The western researchers may well have, and justifiably too, attributed the Greek and/or the Romans with the origin of almost every single thing, but the need today, for us, is not to look at things through tinted] glasses.

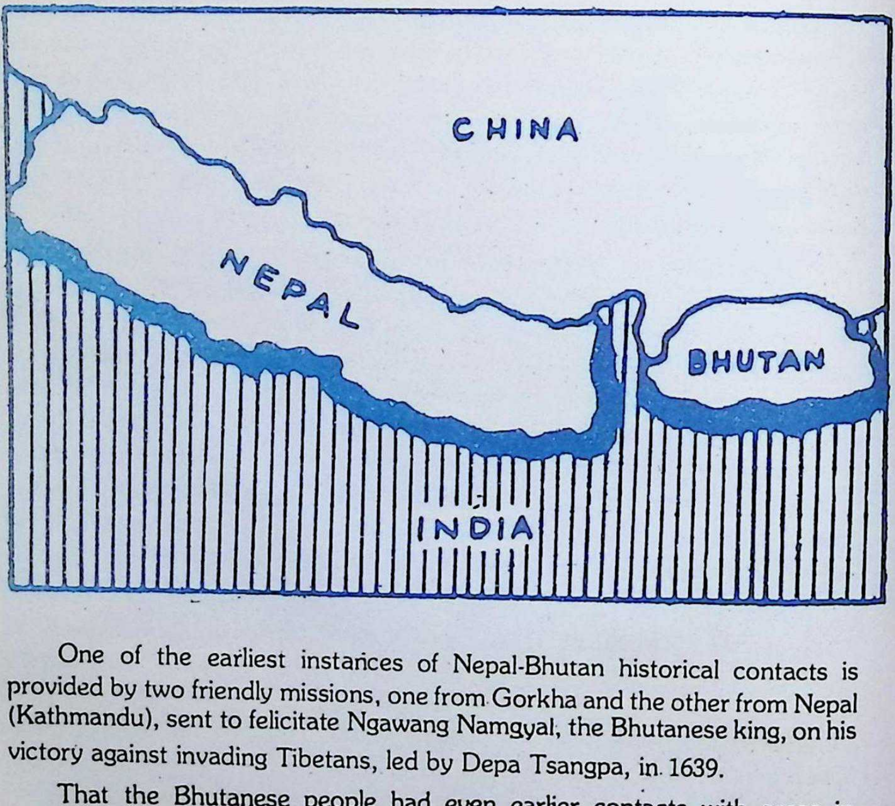
Granted, for argument's sake, that the "Shiva" of the Himalayas-- the deity that ultimately found his way into the Vedic or Puranic Hindu pantheon--was too far removed from "Rudra" of the Indus Valley era, both distance - wise and time - wise. Granted, too, that the Kiratas, possibly a pre-historic people of the Tibeto - Burman origin that dominated areas lying between the Himalayas and the Ganges, could not have been associated with the Indus Valley civilisation, as held by many scholars.

Yet, the Kiratas of the Himalayan belt do find a mention in such ancient texts as the Vedas. They are referred to, for instance, in the Yajurveda as also in the Atharvaveda, not to speak of the later *Puranas* and epics such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Now, even the most authentic dating of the Vedas puts their authorship to sometime between 2500 B.C. and 1500 B.C. By this reckoning, too, the Kirata civilisation, if there was any, antedates the Greek one by at least a few hundred years. And if Lord Shiva was at all a Kirata deity, he must have lived sometime around the Vedic age, if not earlier. How the phallic worship originated in this part of the world is a different question, but to ascribe its invention to the Greeks is a far fetched imagination.

There is another way of looking at it too. The *Vamshavalis* (geneaologies) which are our major source of pre-historic information about Nepal in general and the Kathmandu Valley in particular, would at least have us believe that the Kiratas were the original settlers in this region. The Vamshavalis give us a list of some 29 Kirati kings who had ruled the Kathmandu Valley, and some of them have been treated as contemporaries of Lord Buddha. Agreed that these Vamshavalis have yet to find archaeological or epigraphic corroboration to prove their authenticity. But till such time that counter-evidence is forthcoming, we will be justified in believing, after the Vamshavalis, that the Shiva-worshipping Kirata civilisation flourished in Nepal around 3000 B.C. As such, even in the present state of our knowledge, sketchy as it is, we can question the contention that the phallus worship originated in ancient Greece.

TRN August 2, 1983

Early Nepal-Bhutan Contacts



One of the earliest instances of Nepal-Bhutan historical contacts is provided by two friendly missions, one from Gorkha and the other from Nepal (Kathmandu), sent to felicitate Ngawang Namgyal, the Bhutanese king, on his victory against invading Tibetans, led by Depa Tsangpa, in 1639.

That the Bhutanese people had even earlier contacts with areas in Nepal like Mustang can be inferred on the basis of a land grant, made by the Ladakh king Sengge Namgyal (1590-1645), to the north of the Himalayas around Mt. Kailash and Man-Sarovar. (Incidentally, it may be mentioned that both the Ladakhis and Bhutanese belonged to the same religious sect, the *Drukpa Kagyu*, and were thus opposed to Tibet). A Bhutanese monk officer, designated Druk Kangri Lama, administered those villages and may have thus come into contact with Mustang.

It was during the reign of Sonam Lhendhup, popularly known as Deb Shidar, that Bhutan, which already had its grip over the state of Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar or the "Habitat of the Koch People"), invaded Sikkim as also Vijayapur in to-day's eastern Nepal. The territory of Vijayapur (or Morang) extended between Purnea in Bihar and Sikkim. Shidar was joined by Raikat Ram Narayan, the Cooch Bihar ruler, in the expedition against Vijayapur, but they "were thwarted by Prithvi Narayan Shah (ca. 1769-75), who took Vijayapur for himself". That was possibly the only occasion when Nepal and Bhutan came to an armed clash of sorts. But the link this 'clash' established between the two kingdoms was destined to be close and long.

The reasons were not far to seek. Both were emerging Himalayan kingdoms, threatened by an ever-expanding East India Company. They had to come to one another's rescue if they wanted to jointly survive against the Britishers. In fact, while Deb Shidar was confronted by Warren Hasting's troops who had come to the "rescue" of Koch Bihar from the hands of the Bhutanese, the former had already established some sort of an alliance with king Prithvi Narayan Shah. The latter, an intrepid foe of the British, sought the intervention of Panchen Lama II on Shidar's behalf. For, Nepal foresaw in Shidar's defeat a bleak prospect for herself too, and, as such, did not want this conflict to end in a disaster for Shidar. A strong Bhutan could always keep the British at bay as far as she was concerned.

The third "party" in this anti-British alliance was Assam (then Kamrupa?) The frequent despatch of British troops to the Assam, Bhutan and Nepal frontiers for ostensible "reconnaissance surveys" had created uneasiness all round and brought the three States together in a sort of a loose alliance.

It is said that this kind of connexion between Bhutan and Nepal and the holding of estates by Bhutan in Nepal had precedents even during the earlier Malla period, but not much is known about them. Also, Bhutan's privileges in Nepal, whatever they had been, were said to have increased particularly after the conflict between Nepal and Tibet in 1788, with Bhutan holding estates in lower Mustang, and in some Tamang and Yolmo areas. The Bhutan Gomba (monastery) in Mustang, extant to this day, is said to commemorate a Bhutanese princess married to a former Mustang king. Bhutan has also retained some kind of a mission in Kathmandu since those days, according to some sources.

When a *coup d'etat* was pulled off in Bhutan by the rivals of Deb Shidar, king Prithvi Narayan Shah refused to recognise the new regime in Bhutan and is said to have sent 200 troops to help Shidar. But that was too late. Also too late was the intervention that came from the Panchen Lama III as a result of Nepal's persuasion, for, by the time the Panchen Lama's (1737-80) letter reached Calcutta on March 29, 1774, Hastings had already accepted the terms of a "peace offer" from the new Bhutanese rulers. Hastings was quick to make political capital out of this intervention, however, and made it appear that he was ceasing military operations against Bhutan on Panchen Lama's request!

During the reign of Deb Jigme Sengge (1776-86), the Bhutanese agent in Nepal was Lama Tenzing Druggyal. It is even said that Nepal presented Kalari and Thong Man "estates" to Bhutan in return for its neutrality during Nepal's invasion of Sikkim (1773). Also, following the rupture in Nepal's relations with Tibet, the Swayambhunath temple was brought under the protection of Bhutan's Shabdung Rimpoche.

The Bhutan-Swayambhunath connection was not an abrupt development however. A story has it that king Narbhupal Shah of Gorkha who had been issueless, had invited a Bhutanese Lama,....to invoke divine benediction is his favour so that a son could be born. When the king had, in fact, a son in the person of Prithvi Narayan Shah, a highly obliged Narbhupal Shah had asked the Lama what he could do for the latter in return. He would ask for a gift at the oppropriate time, the Lama is said to have replied. When king Prithvi Narayan Shah had, in the course of his life-long Nepal-unification campaign, brought the erstwhile city-states of Kathmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur and Kirtipur under his rule, the Bhutanese Lama returned to Nepal, and reminded the king of his father's promise. Prithvi Narayan made a land-grant to the Lama including the right to conduct the affairs of the Swayambhunath stupa.

A similar story is recounted by the well-known writer, Bhuvan Lal Pradhan, in a publication "Swayambhu" (1984).

The disruption of such a cordial cultural relation persisting between Nepal and Bhutan we thus unfortunately owe, in a large measure, to Jung Bahadur. It was in retaliation to Bhutanese refusal to help him in his Tibetan adventure, as is evident from Mr. Pradhan's account.

Despite this brief interlude, however, Nepal and Bhutan have both striven to restore cordial relations in the recent past. Recent developments in Nepal-Bhutan amity need no reiteration here.□

TRN December 13, 1983

The Lakhan Thapa Legend

The Magars, as a community, are known for their simplicity. Hardly do we come across a Magar who dabbles in diplomacy or even *chiplomacy,* if we may be permitted to coin such an expression. It is this very rusticity and straightforwardness in their dealings that perhaps make the Magars one of the most disciplined armymen ever, here as well as elsewhere.

Yet, we come across, once in a long while, certain examplary exceptions. And the career of one Lakhan Thapa Magar, otherwise a simple villager hailing from the remote backwaters of the Gorkha district, is one such example that shines across the firmament of Nepalese religio-politics, giving rise not only to diverse legends, but also leading many of his community folk to regard him as a virtual divinity. *Lakhaney Deota* is said to have been the appellation given to him or the shrine built by him.

But this Lakhan Thapa is not to be confused with his namesake—another legendary figure and contemporary of king Ram Shah. As such, we might even term him Lakhan Thapa II. Also, unlike Lakhan Thapa I, he was a political mobiliser of sorts and his movement was said to have been directed against the then premier Janga Bahadur Rana. Not less than seven of his followers, including Ajakh Singh Chumi and Achhaami Magar, faced death as 'rebels' against Janga Bahadur a full 62 years before Shukra Raj Shastri, Gangalall and others attained martyrdom in 1942.

This legend of a man, Lakhan, was born in the Manakamana area of Gorkha district. It is said that, for a while, he has been in some sort of government service in Kathmandu, but returned to Gorkha with another colleague, Ajakh Singh, to settle in Bhugot Kaule Bhangar village till his death in the year 1934 B.S.(1877 AD.)

From the little that we have come to know about him, he appears to have been a fervent devotee of Goddess Manakamana, whose temple, till this day, is one of the most sought-after pilgrimages in Nepal. According to others, he was a *Siddha* of the Josmani cult and his reportedly divine propensities had attracted not only people from his own community but also from amongst Brahmans, Chhetris and others as his followers, precisely because the Josmanis are basically caste-defiant. It is also said of him that he would forecast the possibility of his seizing the reins of power from Janga Bahadur, and, if ever he succeeded, he would share the spoils of power among his followers. It could be the lure of possible pelf and power that may have drawn many of the village idlers to his side.

Of his Brahman followers was one Kalu Lamsal. But, even as 7 other members of Lakhan's coterie were allegedly hanged on the orders of Janga Bahadur, Lamsal is said to have excaped the ultimate punishment simply by virtue of his being a Brahman, as killing a Brahman was against the tenets of Hinduism. That Janga Bahadur spared the life of Lamsal goes to show, as a sidelight, the basically god-fearing nature of Janga.

Lakhan Thapa is said to have built for himself a palatial building at Kaula Bhangar, complete with a shrine of Manakamana. People from many surrounding areas thronged the place for paying obeisance to the goddess and listen to Lakhan's religious discourses, in the process of which, it is said, he also used to mobilise popular opinion against the powers-that-be in Kathmandu.

Lakhan Thapa's 'supernatural' propensities are also believed to have included the drinking of fresh blood gushing out of birds and animals that used to be sacrificed at his Mahakamana altar evey day! It is understandable that, in a relatively backward and superstition-ridden society, attributes such as this lent him an instant halo of spiritual 'prowess' as an accomplished *Tantrik*. "Nothing is impossible for him", his followers are believed to have felt, and, as a result, hundreds of people also used to visit him for succour, physical or otherwise.

This widerspread popularity and influence of his could easily have edged his political appetites too, and, in order, perhaps,to give a concrete shape to his dreams, he is believed to have set up a 'rebel government' of sorts in Gorkha with himself as the *Mukhtiyaar* (premier) and Ajakh Singh as a 'General' by virtue of the latter's brief stint in the army earlier. In fact, such a remarkable marksman was Singh that he was reputed to able to easily shoot down a little bird perched on the hump of 'a bull without the animal receiving even a scratch!

The central government in Kathmandu had hardly any office in the viecinity of Gorkha, thus making it immensely easier for Lakhan to run his show without much resistance. But this didn't mean Kathmandu was completely unaware of the goings-on in Lakhan's 'palace'. Sarbajit Thapa, who had been entrusted by Janga Bahadur to supervise state affairs in the area, kept the latter constantly fed with all information, usually spiced to suit Kathmandu's palate. That Lakhan had declared himself as goddess Manakamana's representative on earth, that he had been instigating people to rebel against the central authority or that he had appropriated large tracts of land to himself and his followers, were said to form the major refrain of Sarbajit's repetitious reports.

Alarmed at all this, Premier Janga Bahadur sent word that Lakhan Thapa and his coterie be physically eliminated and his palace razed to the ground. Hours later, however, Jang Bahadur sent another message instructing the concerned persons to defer Lakhan's assassination.

Lal Bahadur Singh, a Newar shopkeeper at Bimkot Deorali, whose establishment also functioned as an exchange post-office in his capacity of *Dwaare*,had the first of the two messages despatched to the addressee post-haste, but retained the second one,for reasons best known to himself.

On hearing the sentence of death passed by Janga Bahadur against him, Lakhan Thapa is said to have told his would-be executors to spare the trouble and volunteered to hang himself by the nearest tree!

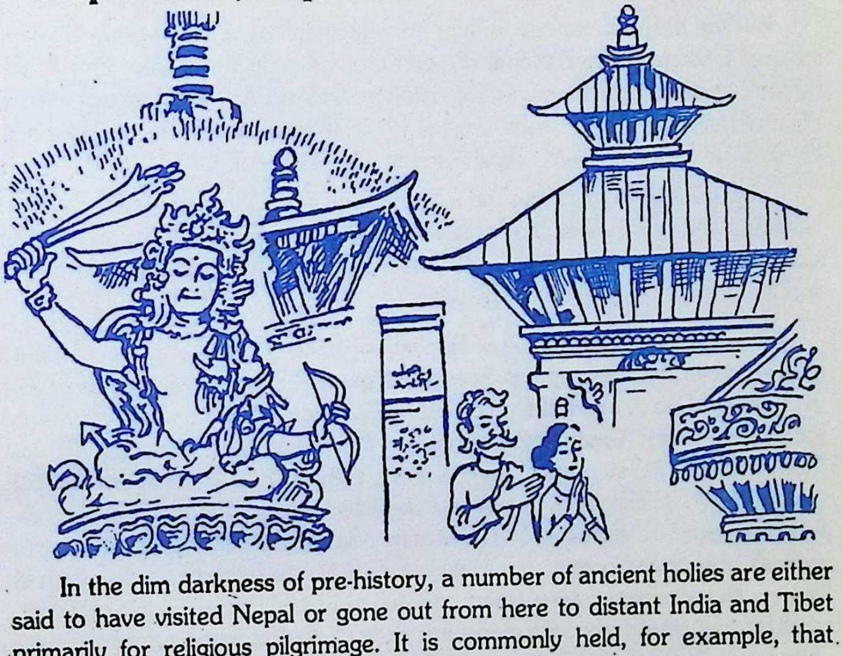
But, before he did so, he is believed to have prophesied Janga's death in the presence of a large number of his followers gathered there in the following words:

"I am not going to die. However, it I am to turn in to a corpse, Janga Bahadur will immediately follow suit in the tradition of a *Sati*"!

Call it a coincidence if you will, but Janga Bahadur, who had been on a hunting expedition to Pattharghatta at the time of Lakhan's 'execution', is said to have died the same day under mysterious circumstances. (Some would have us believe that he died at the hands of a jilted husband, who, incidentally, was also a Magar; others hold that he was a victim of a court conspiracy; still others feel that he was mauled to death by a 'white' tiger!)

The 'palace' of Lakhan Thapa is reduced to a shambles today. But the shrine of Lakhaney Deota remains, though it has seemingly been removed from there to a nearby locale. If Lakhan Thapa and seven of his followers had, in fact, been hanged at Manakamana on the orders of Premier Janga Bahadur, they should rightly be entitled to don the mantle of 'The First Martyrs to the cause of the country's liberation from the Rana rule—a process that culminated in the latter's ultimate downfall in 1950, followed by the restoration of Nepalese royalty to its rightful place.

Nepal-India, Nepal-Tibet Religious Exchange



In the dim darkness of pre-history, a number of ancient holies are either said to have visited Nepal or gone out from here to distant India and Tibet primarily for religious pilgrimage. It is commonly held, for example, that Dharmakara, a disciple coming along with the Chinese savant, Manju shree, was probably the first ruler Kathmandu Valley ever had and that king Prachandadeva, from Gaud (Bengal), came here to become the disciple of another legendary saint, Gunakara.

Coming to history proper, Shankaracharya figures prominently as an eighth-century Hindu savant from South India who is said to have visited the Valley on a seemingly self-appointed mission to re-instal Hinduism (more precisely, Shaivism) back on the pedestal from which it had more or less been dislodged by competing local cults.

Not that we are in a position to contradict this account appearing primarily in our *Vamshavalis*. But what should be stated rather categorically, at least in order to set the records straight, is that the accounts dealing with Shankaracharya's own holy travels do nowhere mention Nepal in the list of countries visited by him. As such, we for one aren't prepared to believe, merely on the basis of legends and tales, that Shankaracharya did, in fact, set his foot in Nepal. Nor has it been proved that Dharmadduta, a king of Coonjeeveram, also in south India, was the person to build the famous temple of Pasupatinath, as the chronicles aver.

But we have evidences to suggest that there were some other Shaivite savants who had visited Nepal sometime or other in its history. One of the better known among them was, for instance, Acharya Amritamitra, a priest and pilgrim hailing possibly from Varanasi. He is also said to find mention in "Kulottāra Tantra", dated Nepal Sambat 289 (1169 A.D.)

That such visiting pilgrims go to form a link in the long chain of Nepal-India relations and religious exchange is undeniable. What's interesting also, in this context, is to note that not only laymen but also kings from distant lands made it a point to visit Nepalese holy places.

Dharmapal, another king of Bengal, for instance, is said to have made a pilgrimage to the then famous Shaivite religious shrine of Gokarneshwar near Kathmandu. Also, one Lakshmideva Som, a "great" Brahmin scholar from far off Maharastra in South India, not only visited Nepal for a pilgrimage but also had an image of Shiva cast and set-up here, along with an inscription dated N.S. 534 (1414 AD). Evidences such as this go to indicate that Nepal's fame as a pilgrimage centre wasn't limited to its neighbouring principalities but had spread almost upto the shores of the Indian ocean—it had become, in other words, verily a centre of international repute. Likewise, Dr. Jagadish Chandra Regmi, a well known researcher in history, mentions of a pillar in the vicinity of Balaju bearing an inscription in what he believes is a South Indian, possibly Kannada, script, leading to the presumption that pilgrims coming here from far away Karnataka may have set up the pillar and a possible Nandikeshwar image adjacent to it. The inscription is dated N.S. 705 (1585 AD).

The Damodarpur copper-plate inscription (said to belong to the period of Buddha Gupta, a king of India's Gupta dynasty) bears reference to a land-gift made by one Ribhupal in honour of *Kokamukha Swami*, "of the Himalayas". Now, eminent Indian historians like Hem Chandra Roy Chowdhury and Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee tend to agree that the inscription alludes to Baraha Chhetra in the Nepal terai, till this day a well-known religious centre believed to be hallowed by Lord Vishnu in his boar incarnation. Ribhupal not only visited this holy land of the Vaishnavites and made the aforesaid gift, but also drew inspiration to set up a replica of the *Varaha* image in Dinajpur in Bengal (India) for the convenience of his kith and kin who couldn't afford the arduous trip to Varaha Chhetra, it is said.

If Nepal was thus a cynosure for the eyes of Hindu pilgrims even in ancient times, it was no less significant as a Buddhist pilgrimage centre. We have, of course, heard about sages like Manjushree who came here all the way from China. Stories of Vipashwi Buddha, Sikhi Buddha, and Vishwambhuva Buddha having preceded Manjushree in making a beeline for Nepal are also common. The last of the human (*Manushi*) Buddhas, Siddhartha Gautama, it is said, also came to Kathmandu and Banepa, worshipped at a place which is known to this day as Namo Buddha or Namura, named after him. Also, it is very widely held that the four stupas existing till today at four cardinal points outside Lalitpur town were built by none other than emperor Ashoka himself who came to the valley along with his daughter, Charumati. Why, even the present-day township of Chabahil and the nearby Devapattan are said to have been founded by Charumati and her husband Devapala, respectively.

Much as I personally, also love to narrate these legends, I am unfortunately not in a position to assert that either Lord Buddha's or emperor Ashoka's so-called Kathmandu visits is a fact of history. Precisely because, as in the case of Shankaracharya's visit, we have no historical evidence to support either of these two stories.

But what can be asserted with as much pride is that Nepal was a leading centre for Buddhist learning in the medieval ages, if not also in the ancient. One of the two noted Buddhist scholars to visit Nepal was Basu Bandhu (ca. 4th century AD.) and Atisha Dipankara (10th century), while Buddhist scholars who fanned out to different directions from Nepal with a mission of spreading the Master's messages included such famous names as Shantibhadra (ca. 1055 AD.), Bimalashri, Anantashri, and others. Ratna Rakshita and Ravindra were two other scholars of repute who had drawn better-known Tibetan *Vikhsus* like Dharmaswami to Nepal for a study of Buddhism, Dharmaswami, in his turn, is said to have gone on record saying that he had seen a large number of Tibetan students undergoing religious training in Nepal in the thirteenth centuryA D Roerich has penned a "Biography of Dharmaswamin" which provides a greater insight into him as a man and a scholar.

Hardly less interesting, although not as much highlighted hitherto, is the role played by the medieval Malla kingdom in western Nepal, in the promotion and propagation of Buddhism. King Ashoka Challa, for instance, is credited with having left the legacy to posterity in the shape of two inscriptions at Bodh Gaya (India), indicating that he had made seemingly lasting arrangements for the worship of Buddha there besides probably making land and other grants to a Kashmiri priest for the purpose. Some other kings of the same dynasty, namely, Ripumalla, Punya Malla and Prithivi Malla, were also great patrons of Buddhism and were said to have contributed their mite for its propagation and promotion.

According to the well-known Indian scholar, late Rahul Sankrittyayana, a notable personality to visit Tibet during the reign of king Shrong Tson Gampo and help translate many a Buddhist scripture into Tibetan was another Nepalese, Shilamanju. By so doing, he is said to have made outstanding contribution towards the propagation of the faith in Tibet in the 7th century.

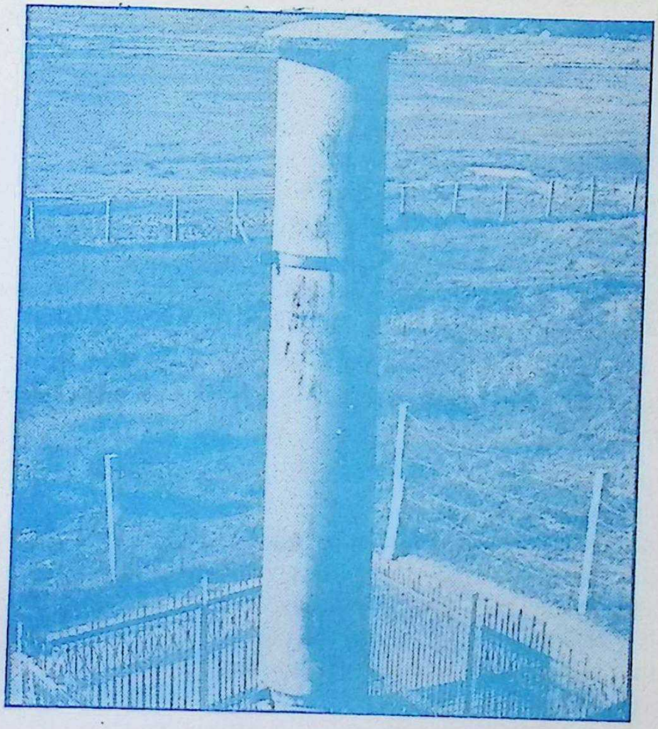
Other Buddhist luminaries to follow the trail blazed by Shilamanju included Bodhi Gupta (ca. 967 AD.), Bagishwar Kirti (ca. 1003 AD.), a resident of Pharping near Kathmandu (according to Surya Bikram Gewali, another noted historian), Shanti Bhadra, Ananta Shree and Gautam Shree. Shanti Bhadra and Ananta Shree are particularly noted for their contributions in getting a number of Buddhist scriptures translated into the Tibetan language. Gautam Shree, in his turn, was not only known as "Maha Pundit" (a Great Buddhist Scholar), but was also credited with the construction of the Saptapur Mahavihara, according to an early 10th century inscription at Guit Vihar, Lalitpur. Two other better-known scholars referred to in the same inscription include Shuva Shree and Rabindra Dev. According to Dr. Kamal Prakash Malla, a well-known scholar, "Ratna Kirti, Virochan (and) Kamalshree were well-known names at (India's) Vikramshila University...(where) Bagishwarkirti later on became a *Dwarapandit* (Head of the Department)... his disciples there included scholars like Niropali Sen (Bengal) and Marpa, founder of Kagya cult in Tibet. It was not an isolated instance but was a moment in Nepalese history which naturally reminds us of the Renaissance in Europe."

Dharma Swami, the Tibetan pilgrim referred to earlier, is said to have credited one Rabindra, possibly another Nepalese, with having taught him the Buddhist scriptures. Dr. Jagadish Chandra Regmi is of the opinion that Rabindra and "Dasabal Labinha", as referred to by the famous Lama Taranath in his treatise "History of Buddhism in India", could have been one and the same person.

Acharya Kshemendra was also another well-known teacher of the Vajrayani tradition in the fifteenth century. Some other seeming contemporaries of his were Sri Jayananda, Gyan Kirtisen and Acharya Subodh Jiva. As the term Acharya applied to most of them is an honorific appellation suggesting great veneration, we can assume that these were no ordinary mortals but Nepalese savants of great repute, despite the scanty references handed down to posterity by history till this day.

TRN May 17, 1985

Our Khasa Forbears



The Khasas, possibly the forbears of many a Nepalsese like myself, were almost as ancient as the Kiratas. And my use of the word 'almost' is deliberate. For, while the Kiraatas—the earliest historical rulers of Nepal known to-date—figure even in the Vedic literature dating back to some 2500 years before Christ, the Khasas find mention only in epics like the Mahabharata and some *Puraanas*. But then, even that means nothing less than some two thousand years from now.

Interestingly enough, no two scholars seem to agree as to where the Khasas originally hailed from. While many of them are often at pains to prove that they came from as remote an area as the Caucasus mountains, the Khasgar valley in Iran or Khasmir (present-day Kashmir), there is no doubt that the major *Khas* concentrations today are limited to the geographical area between Kumaon and Garhwal in the west and Nepal in the east.

Likewise, there is no agreement among scholars as to who the Khasas originally were. While the term 'Kirata', even in its narrower sense, encompasses almost the entire Tibeto-Burman races in Nepal such as the

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Newars, Tamangs, Magars, Gurungs, Rais, Limbus, etc. (even the Lichhavis, according to some), it is difficult to pin-point which races go to fit into the general description of the *Khasas*, despite the fact that 'Khas-Baahun' is a common enough expression in Nepal.

Balkrishna Pokhrel, a well-known Nepalese scholar, has something to this effect to say: "Even those people who are in fact *Khasas* often try to disclaim being one... For example, almost all the Brahmins amongst hillmen deny that they are *Khasas*. So do the Thakuris. According to the Bahuns and the Thakuris, the term *Khasa* only connotes Chhetris like Karkis, Thapas, etc. But, again, these Chhetris, in their turn, dislike being called *Khasas*, and hold that this appellation applies only to the Khatris......."

Dr. Lakshmidatta Joshi, in his treatise "Khasa Family Law", makes an interesting reference to the various customs and practices of the *Khasa* people in general, including the following:

(i) that a Khasa woman may have more than one husband at a time without incurring social stigma;
(ii) that an elder brother's widow may be "inherited" by the younger one;
(iii) that bride-price is common among them;
(iv) that little or no religious rituals are called for in solemnising a Khasa wedding;
(v) that divorce is a matter of right for their womenfolk;
(vi) that wearing of the *Janai* (holy-thread) is not compulsory; and
(vii) that the dead ones are buried rather than cremated.

What appears interesting to this scribe, however, is the fact that many of these customs and traditions will only help us bracket the *Khasas* together with either one or the other of the many tribes and races whom we have referred to as the 'Kiraatas' earlier. Fraternal polyandry, for instance, is nothing uncommon among the Sherpas, Dolpaalis and the like; likewise, burial of the dead is the rule rather than exception amongst the Rais and Limbus as well; divorce, again, is as much a prerogative of many a non-Brahmin and non-Chhetri woman —like the Newar, Tamang, etc., as it is of the Khasas; and, likewise, few other Nepalese, apart from Baahuns and Chhetris, wear the holy thread.

So, we are back to square one—for, by the above reckoning, there is hardly any particular tribe or community in Nepal that can fit into the description of the Khasas. What's more, even famous scholars like Atkinson make confusing statements like: "Some of the *Khasas* are Muslims, some other (are) Buddhists,......(and the rest) Hindus" Another well-known book, the 'Holy

Himalayas,' likewise adds that the Khasas have a "Scythian blood running in their veins", and that "in Nepal and Assam, (the Khasas) are Buddhists".

If either of the above two versions is to be given credence, we can at least be certain that the term *Khasa* does not embrace the 'Khas-Baahuns' alone, as we traditionally understand the term. Who, then, are the *Khasas* proper? the question remains unanswered, as ever!

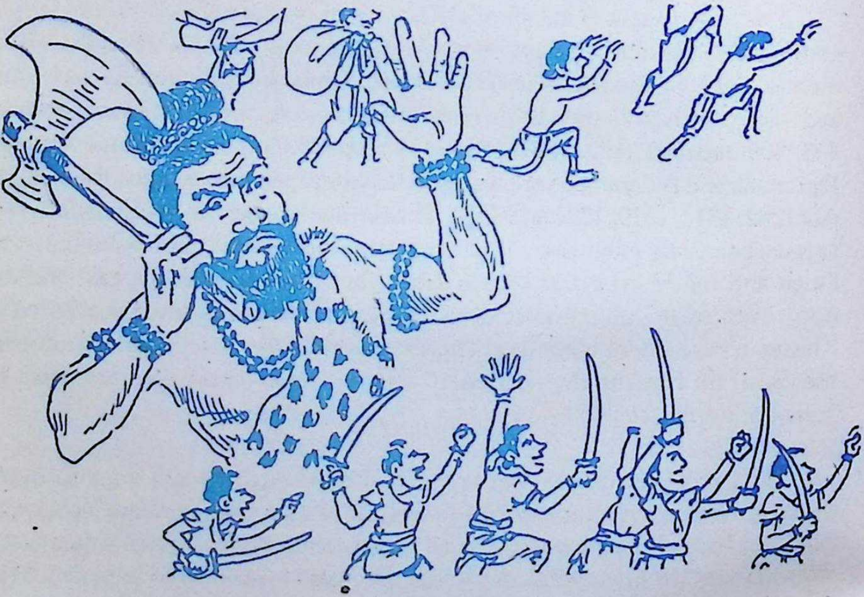
Not, therefore, venturing to hazard any guess on the subject, I would rather leave this question to scholars, anthropologists and historians to answer And, to suit my role as a lay scribe better, I would rather limit myself to casting a cursory glance on the Khasa antiquity and the possible routes of migration to Nepal (and the adjoining areas) in particular.

The first reliable evidence of a *Khasa* ruler having invaded Kathmandu is contained in the oldest extant chronological account, "Gopal Vamshaavali". It mentions the *Sapaadalaksha* (present-day Jumla) king, Jitarimalla, as having laid seige over Kathmandu three times in succession, notably in Newar Samvat 408, 409 and 410 (A.D. 1287, 88 and 89 respectively.) Other *Khasa* kins like Ripumalla and Adityamalla are also said to have repeatedly invaded the valley in AD 1292, 1311, 1319, 1327 and 1334. The Karnali kingdom of the *Khasas* is said to have been very extensive — incorporating Kumaon and Garhwal in the west, Guge and the Mansarovar lake in Tibet, the river Trisuli in the east and the north Indian plains upto Bodh Gaya in the south. The eulogical references to the Khasas contained in, among others, the Ashoka Pillar inscription at Lumbini, the adjacent Nigalihawa inscription and a Gaya inscription are said to corroborate this claim.

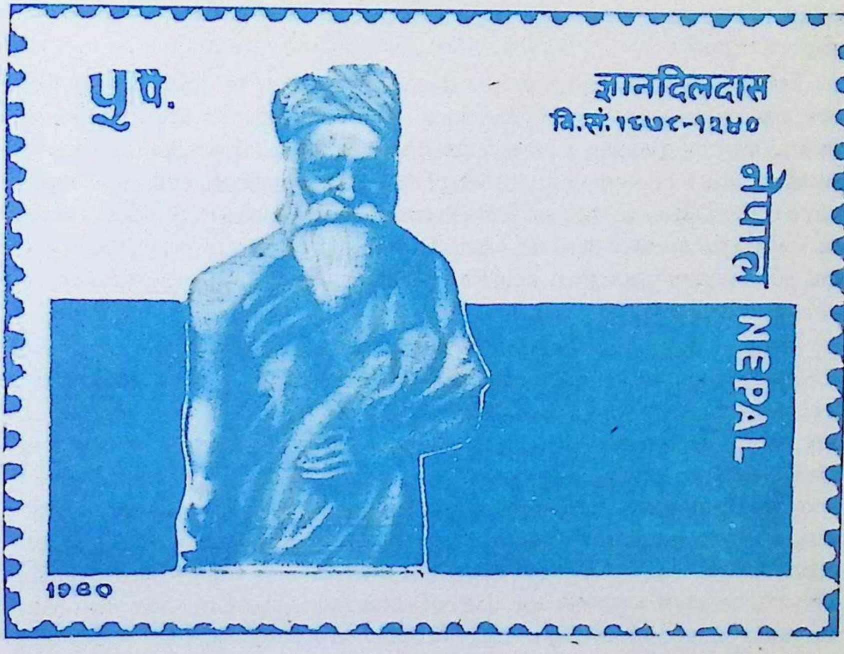
But the enigma of their origin remains. If we are to believe in some accounts such as the ones in *Harivamsha Puraana*, the Khasas were none but Kshatriyas who had fled India in the wake of 'sage' Parasuram's threat to exterminate them. Atkinson, on the other hand, holds that the Aryan invasion into India drove the Khasas into the laps of the mountains, implying thereby that they were not even Aryans, not to speak of being Kshatriyas.

My surmise is that the Khasas were a pre-Aryan — even possibly a non-Aryan — people akin to the Kiraatas. The *Shrimad Bhagawat*, therefore, is perhaps right in bracketing the Khasas together with the Huns, Kiraats, Yavanas, etc. and in suggesting that they were "devoid of (or lacking in) religion", which implies, of course, that they did not subscribe to the Hindu religion proper, at least initially.

But, to me particularly, what is of relevance in this context is not whether the Khasas were Hindus or otherwise. For whoever they were, they in all probability have formed, since time immemorial; a strong ink in the chain that goes to constitute whatever we mean by Nepalese culture and nationhood—a fabric that has been woven jointly by the Aryans, the Austrics, the Dravidians, the Tibeto-Burmans and what have you. An all embracing, tolerant and liberal nationhood that does us proud.□



A Tale Of Two *Santas*



Ever wondered whether we borrowed the term, 'Saint', from the English dictionary or whether our own *Santa* inspired the western lexicographers to coin, if not to adapt, this expression to meet their own requirements?

Leaving this question to be answered by linguists or philologists, to whose domain such disputes rightly belong, let's limit ourselves here to recounting the stories of two old-time *santas* ('saints,' that is!) who deserved to be known better but were almost bypassed by our own literary historians. Almost, that is, till Janaklal Sharma, a researcher of repute, came out, some years ago, with his 575-page Madan *Puraskar*-winning compendium entitled *Josmani Santa Parampara Ra Sahitya* (The Josmani *Santa* Tradition and Literature).

But before we begin recounting the tales of the two leading Josmani savants, first let's try to fathom what the term Josmani itself means. This term figures as one among the bewilderingly wide variety of Hindu religious cults and is, in all probability, named after its founder himself. This cult appears all the more remarkable for the simple reason that it is, unlike most other cults such as Shaivism and Vaishnavism (Hindu), or Vajrayani and Mahayani (Buddhist), it is said to be singularly indigenous to Nepal. And, secondly, unlike the many ancient religious cults which have faded out of our memories, the Josmani cult seems to remain, to this day, a throbbing, if not also a thriving, school of religious thought.

Few people seem to know how deep in the ancient past the roots of this otherwise, popular cult lie. What does, however, come to light, thanks to Sharma's untiring efforts, is the fact that one of its better-known *Santas*, namely Sasidhar, was a contemporary of king Prithvi Narayan Shah, and the second, *santa* Gyan Dildas, of the first Rana Premier, Janga Bahadur. Besides, the 30-odd leading followers of this cult, which Sharma has listed in his book, include no less a Royal personage than king Ranan Bahadur Shah, otherwise also known as Swami Nirvanananda.

From what little can be gathered, we come across three types of religious acolytes in the Josmani cult: the *shabdis* or initiates form the first cadre while they continue to remain householders; the *gurmukhis*, a higher-echelon *Jogis* who don the prescribed garments and may even initiate others as *shabdis;* and the *Gurupanja* who form the highest elite in the religious order. The last named ones bear the five holy 'identification,' such as a white or saffron garment, a bead garland, the mendicant's begging-bag (*jholi*), a particular variety of water-container (*tumba*), a pair of iron tongs (*chimta*) and a one-stringed lyre (*ektara*). This last order of *josmanis* are also not expected to shave or shear their hair, are not cremated when they die but are buried in a cross-legged sitting posture, and no other funeral rites are called for, like, for instance, the 13-day mourning ritual decreed in the event of a Hindu adult's death. The josmanis are known to be non-alcoholics, and possibly also inconoclasts; though not all are averse to meat-eating or marrying, they observe no caste-barriers either.

Among the leading Josmani religious and literary luminaries was Sasidhar as referred to above. Born in the Prasutpuri village on the banks of the Trishuli in 1804 BS (or 1747 A.D.), he accompanied a group of elderly local pilgrims, while he was still a very young boy of about 12, on their long trip to the famous temple of Jagannath in Puri (Orissa), only to be involved in an accident on the banks of the Subarnarekha river that broke his right arm. A legend associated with the event has it that the chief *panda* or priest of the Jagannath temple dreamed that night of a promising *siddha* (holyman) arriving in the person of Sasidhar. The Lord in the temple, it is said, himself ordered the search of this young pilgrim. Once discovered, Sasidhar found himself turned into a religious celebrity overnight. He is believed to have spent the next eleven years of his life at the temple studying holy scriptures, till he returned to Nepal as a social reformer determined to eradicate institutions like the caste-system and Brahministic rituals known as *Karmakanda*.

During his brief 5-year stay in Kathmandu, first on the banks of the Bishnumati and later on at Shivapuri (?), he had a *Kuti* built for him by king Prithvi Narayan Shah himself. Also many highly-placed court officials, including Dhokal Singh Basnet, were initiated into his faith.

Following the death of king Prithvi Narayan Shah, Sasidhar left Kathmandu to spend the rest of his life preaching the new faith from the now-famous Resunga *math* in Gulmi district. His fame as a spiritual leader continued to spread to such an extent that even premier Janga Bahadur is said not only to have visited Sasidhar at Resunga but also to have made a number of land grants to help him build *mathas* (shrines) at Bharse, Chandrakot, Khangufa, etc.

As a literateur, Sasidhar has many hymns and other literary compositions to his credit.

Born in 1878 B.S. (1821 AD) or thereabout at either Ilam or Dhankuta, Gyan Dildas is better-known for spreading josmani cult in areas outside it—mainly in Darjeeling, Sikkim and Bhutan, although he had set up his main Ashram at Rumjatar, a Gurung-majority area in mid-eastern Nepal.

Those were the times of Janga Bahadur's premiership. Already alarmed at the anti-Rana nuances of yet another Josmani centre at Bunkot in Gorkha district under the spiritual leadership of Lakhan Thapa (II), it was but natural for Janga Bahadur to suspect a link between the Josmani groups at Gorkha and Rumjatar. So, Janga had both Lakhan Thapa and Gyan Dildas arrested and brought over to Kathmandu. While Lakhan and his 7 followers were soon to be charged with sedition and hanged at Gorkha, Sasidhar was not only fortunate in escaping the ultimate punishment but, on the cotrary, was also successful in converting Janga's own brother and right-hand-man, Ranoddip Singh, to the Josmani cult. Expectedly, on being released after a six-month internment, Gyan Dildas proceeded to Rumjatar with Janga's "blessings", and from there to Limbuan and Ilam areas further east.

When he reached Ilam, Gyan Dildas is said to have had a contingent of 300 followers with him. The local authorities were alarmed at this seeming "show of force" and he faced internment there for the second time. A disgusted Dildas then left Nepal for good and settled in Darjeeling, where he was to be famous later as the 'Bible-Burner.'

The story goes thus: as usual, the British flag was in the process of following the footsteps of the Bible in the Darjeeling areas. Christianity was virtually riding a crest of popularity among the simple hillfolk there under the patronage of preachers like Rev. A. Turnbull whom many of us know as a pioneer author of the first Nepali-grammar also.

It is said that there was literally a head-on collision between Dildas and Turnbull, each trying to prove the superiority of his faith to the other. Dildas emerged 'victorious' at the end of a 7-day discourse with the Christians, and in keeping with the terms of a wager laid earlier, publicly burnt the holy Bible and distributed its ashes amongst his jubilant Josmanis!

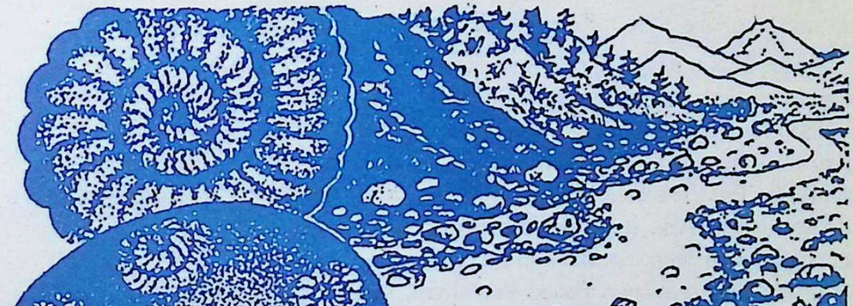
But a gallant Rev. Turnbull, dispite his severe loss of face, went to the other extent of placating his holy foe by way of manoevering a land-grant in favour of Dildas at a place called Rungbull, which till today forms a better-known Josmani pilgrimage center!

Dildasji's later religious forays into Sikkim are subject of no less dramatic developments, but constraints of space forbid us here from going into greater details. Suffice it to say that, of the two Sikkimese josmani shrines, one at Geling and the other at Rani which owe their existence to him, the first became the site of his burial when he died there in 1940 B.S. (1883 AD). It is said that he had even forecast the exact day and time of his death about 1½ months earlier!

Gyan Dil Das is credited with the composition of *Udaya Lahari*, a major representative literary work, besides some 60 *bhajans* (hymns). He is also the first effective exponent of the *jhyaaure* (lilting folk tune) medium in the composition of Nepalese hymns.

TRN, June 28, 1985

On The Shaligram Trail



Up on the other side beyond the massive, snow-capped silveriness of the Annapurna, Dhaulagiri and Nilgiri mountains, along the upper—and surprisingly,wider—reaches of the Kali Gandaki, I found myself one day hunting for the legendary multi-hued stone pebbles. And I wasn't alone in the pebble-hunting exercise. Countless were the trekkers, winding their way towards Jomosom and Muktinath, or on their way back, whose eyes were not unoften glued to the many miles long sand-bed trail, obviously hoping to lay hands on the *Shaligram*. So seemingly did the sturdy *Bakkhu*-clad muleteers who drove hordes of yaks, mules and donkeys either on their way up towards Jomosom or down towards Tatopani. All must have read or heard, I felt, that one could accidentally kick or unknowingly step on the famed *Shaligram*, a kind of smooth and shiny, often oblong like a bird's egg, fossilised ammonite so dear and sacred to all Hindus, and so well-known as a collector's item among everybody else. With luck, one could perhaps make a fast buck too!

But three days of trekking along the banks of the Kali Gandaki (otherwise also known as the *Shaligraami*, after the famous stones which are its speciality), right upto its stream-like origin near the holy Muktinath shrine, yielded nothing. Not that I hadn't pocketed my share of all shapes and sizes of pebbles,but none was a *Shaligram* proper. And the closest look we had had of these sacred pebbles was through the courtesy of the Pradhan Pancha of Kagbeni Village Panchayat beyond Jomosom, who, besides being an inn-keeper, had also made a successful business of *Shaligram* bying and selling. Unfortunately for us, however, the ten or more *Shaligram* specimens he had in his possession at the time—all, of course, for sale to the highest bidder—had been split into two, like a fruit cut right through the middle.

I had, of course, seen many *Shaligrams* (which are, according to science, an extant order of mollusks, some 100 to 200 million years old!) since my childhood, and,coming as I do from a priestly Brahmin family, we even used to carry a couple of them around whenever we visited our *'Jajamans'* (ritual clients) for this ceremony or the other. But never had I seen a *Shaligram* split into two halves. Also, it was no little surprise for me to see that each of the cross-sections bore a deep, circular and spinal imprint, mould-like, as if a corkscrew or wire-rope had remained coiled into them, layer upon spiral layer, for long enough to leave a circuitous, mazy mark.

But why on earth had those beautiful pebbles been so mercilessly split ?-I asked the owner.

"The Nepalese prefer them solid and unsplit", he replied, "but they don't pay you enough. The foreign tourists. on the other hand, are prepared to pay a good price, but would like us to prove that they are the genuine *Shaligrams*. But how else can we prove they are the real stuff unless we break them open to show them these circular, embedded, fossil-imprints?"

The commercial instinct of people like him, it seemed, must have taken a heavy toll of the increasingly rare *Shaligram* specimens, or whatever little remained of them. They would, I thought, soon be a thing of the past. Aesthetic and spiritual considerations had been given a cruel go by like nobody's business, thank you!

In Kathmandu, one often hears tales of "one-eyed" or "one-mouthed" *Rudraksha* rosary-beads and "one-eyed" *Shaligrams* being the rarest of collectors' items and fetching enormous prices if only one can lay hands on them. And curiously enough, the Pasupatinath temple remains (whether in point of fact or merely in popular belief–I am not in a position to determine) the sole repository of the only extant pieces in Nepal,of both! The "eyes" in a *Shaligram*, believe scientists, lead to air-chambers within that permit the shells to swim to a certain degree.

We find reference to *Shaligrams*—as also their antiquity and the high religious esteem in which they have been traditionally held—in many *puranas* like the Skanda, Padma, Varaha, Bramhanda and Narasimha. Scholars hold that the origin of *Shaligram*-worship in this part of the world dates at least to 2000 years. It is said also that the *Vajra-Kit* (a worm as strong as the *Vajra)* that remains embedded in a circular form, like a coiled-up snake, inside the *Shaligram* stones represents Lord Vishnu himself. Also, the number of *Chakra* coils found inside them is believed to be a measure of their relative 'holiness'–a single coil representing the Sudarshan, a double one representing Lakshmi-Narayana, and the like. A total of twelve or more coils, one spiral atop the other, is said to exist inside these stones.

Besides their value as rare curio items or their inherent religious characteristics, the *Shaligrams* are also much sought after, commercially, on the strength of the popular belief that grains of gold are found inside them. In fact, I could easily suspect the motive of the Kagbeni inn-keeper when he had shown us the half-split *Shaligrams*—'proving' their genuineness to the tourist-customers was only a part of the story and, perhaps, a less important part: the objective of collecting the gold grains from inside them must have been the greater lure!

Shaligrams are believed to come in many hues - white, black, red, yellow, grey, etc. Many of them also bear long, thread-like, streaks of white or grey appearing all around the outer casing; these streaks, the devotees believe, represent the *Janai* or holy thread worn by Lord Vishnu or Lord Shiva, as you please!

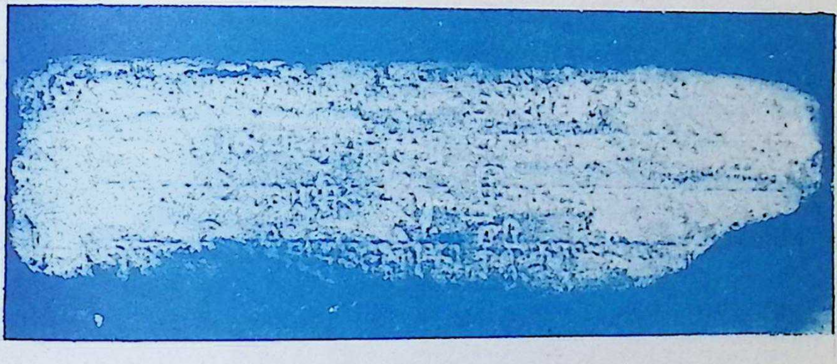
Despite the age-old Nepalese belief that it is sinful to trade in *Shaligrams*, this traditional taboo is seen to have been observed more in violation over the decades. And it is not only people with a greedy eye on the tourist-dollar that are to be blamed for it. Nepalese history is replete with instances where successive governments have, time and again, found the futility of imposing restrictions on *Shaligram*-trading at the hands of irreverent – if not unscrupulous – traders at exhorbitant prices. The *Mulki Ain* (legal code) promulgated in 1910 B.S. (1853 A.D), for example, set the price of the Lakshmi Narayan variety at Rs. 100 apiece - not a pice more!

Also, with a view to discouraging the rampant practices of breaking-up of *Shaligrams*, edicts seem to have been issued, occasionally, by Nepalese authorities. The last one to come to our notice in the form of a stone inscription dates back to 1998 A.D., (some 87 years ago from now), issued by premier Bir Shumshere. In fact, it seems to have been prompted by the constant and repeated floutings of many earlier edicts and official circulars on the subject. The text of the said stone-inscription, in the Muktinath area, has been reproduced by the well-known scholar-savant, Yogi Naraharinath, in one of his publications. Any further violations of the order, the edict is said to have read, will lead "to the arrest and imprisonment of the accused for two months."

How important a place *Shaligram*-worship has occupied in Nepalese culture (both Hindu and Buddhist) is also evident from the fact that at least four ancient and published Sanskrit manuscripts on the subject have been found to exist in the National Archives to this day. There have been, scholars hold, many other books besides those, which include a full-length *Shaligram Upanishad*, a *Shaligram-Nighantu*, and a *Shaligram Mimamsha*, among others.

TRN, June 21, 1985

Where Was Bharavi Born?



"Upama Kalidasasya, Bharave arthagauravam,
Dandinah Padalalityam, Maghe santi trayogunah"....

The above is a Sanskrit couplet believed to be quoted from Udbhata's commentary on the "Kavyalankara" of Bhamaha.

Roughly translated, it reads:

"Kalidasa (is known for his) similies, Bharavi for his profundity of thought and meaning and Dandi for beauty of diction, while Magha (represents) the combination of all three attributes."

There have been countless Sanskrit poets and writers throughout history beginning from such ancient epic-writers as Valmiki and Vyasa, of the "Ramayana" and "Mahabharata" fame respectively. Coming to the middle ages, considered the most creative phase of classical Sanskrit literature, we come across many eminent poets and authors besides those named above, including Harsha, Vana, Bhartrihari, Bhavabhuti, to name just a few, who have shone across the literary firmament.

But, that the noted commentator, Udbhata (ca. 8th century AD), ignored scores of them by bracketing together just the four, Kalidasa, Bharavi, Dandi and Magha, in his above couplet goes to establish their unquestionable pre-eminence. And, as far as Bharavi is concerned, I seek to underscore his qualities of head and heart as reflected in yet another quote, as follows:

"Despite virulent criticism and unpardonable glosses, Bharavi has survived with us for his most quotable quotes, profundity of thoughts, sublimity of diction, faithfulness of his description of men and nature, and for the 'feast of reason and the flow of soul'......"

This brief write-up, not purporting to present a critique of this famous poet and his immortal poetry, merely seeks to deal with the question of Bharavi's life and times, particularly in respect of his place of birth, lineage, *etcetra*. Where, in other words, was this celebrated author of "Kiratarjuniye" born, where did he live, who were his mentors and patrons and during which period of history? All these have been subjects of diverse conjectures, speculations, claims and counter-claims at the hands of literary critics. It was only recently, that is as late as in 1956, that Professor R. Gnoli's reading of a Nepalese inscription revealed, to the pleasant surprise of all concerned, the name of Bharavi in connection with the delimitation of the boundary of a monastery on the bank of river Manumati or Manohara near Kathmandu. This inscription is said to indicate that the poet appears to have begun his career as a religious acolyte during the Lichhavi rule in *Nepal*.

Writes Kaisher Bahadur K. C. in "The Kiratarjuniye by Bharavi"(1972):

"Although the date of this inscription was illegible, yet circumstantial evidence indicates that this was, perhaps, the last inscription proclaimed in the oint names of king Siva-deva I and Amsuvarman.... This was the first indication that Bharavi ...was born and brought up in Nepal, and further that the poet was anterior to king Siva-deva I and Amsuvarman."

But a note of caution seems to be in order here. For, the well-known author of "India" (1959), Herman Goetz, is said to have made out a point, on the basis of the evidence of the 7th century poet Ravikirti's inscription in Magauti in south India, that Bharavi was the protege of a Pallava-king, Mahendra Varman (ca. 600-630). K. C. also alludes to Bharavi's references to Kanchi in south India, but that does not deter him from pointing out that "the poet was a much travelled man and that Nepal had contacts with the South Indian ports and cities" at the time.

The aforesaid dedicatory slab belonging to the Lichhavi period and bearing the name of Bharavi itself seems to have passed through a chequered 'career' in recent times. While the noted historian and researcher, Nayaraj Panta, had "seen it" sometime in 1940 AD (at Harigaon?), he and his colleagues were mystified to find it missing when they visited the site subseqently for a more detailed study. What seems to have happened, in the meantime, was that a neighbour of one Rajman Kusule, a local tailor, had the slab removed from the Harigaon platform in order to pave the foundation of his own house!

It must be said to be a sheer fortuitous accident, then, that K.C. ran across Rajman while doing the rounds of Harigaon in search of the missing slab some 20 years later, in February 1967. And thanks both to K.C.'s perserverance and his chance meeting with Rajman, this priceless treasure of antiquity was rescued and reportedly deposited in the Nepal Museum soon after.

On the strength of his reading of this stone inscription, K.C. asserts that it bears "northern Brahmi characters and Sanskrit language of early Lichhavi period" and that it "was inscribed by the order of Bharavi in order to commemorate the construction of a water-conduit *(dhara)* in honour of his grandfather, king Mana-deva I. ... through his daughter Vijayavati (and her 'Shiva-like' husband, Vartta, i.e., "officer", Deva-labha)."

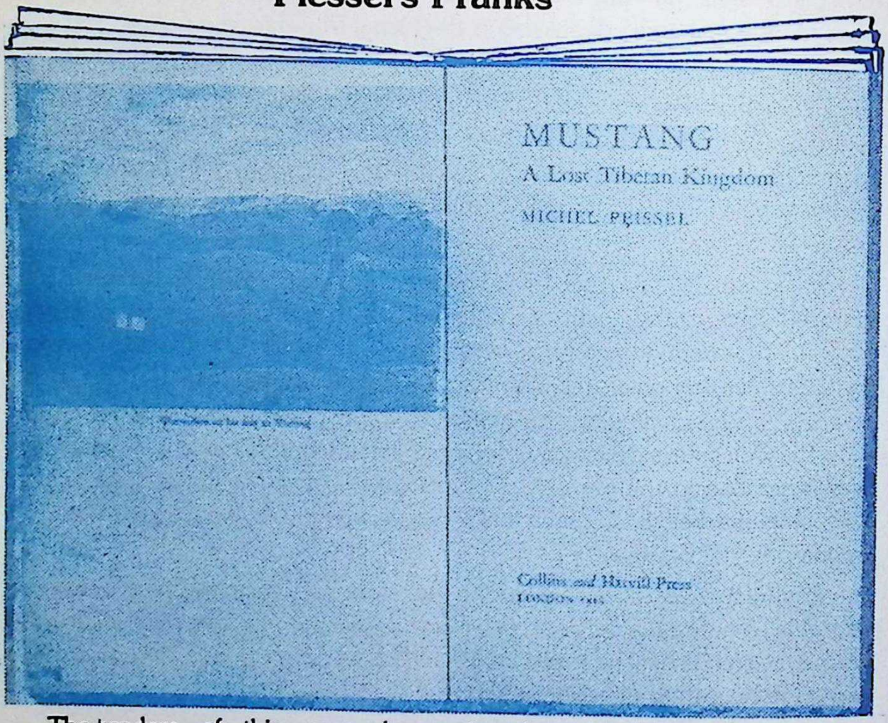
To quote K.C. further: "This *dhara* of Bharavi, which is situated in a secluded place to the north of the temple of what is known today as Satya-Narayana, has survived with a very ancient bas-relief of Uma Mahesvara, *Makaras* (mythical creatures with the face of a crocodile), Nakula (mongoose) lid-covers and *chaitya* to bear testimony to the poet's faith... This particular water-conduit spurts deliciously cool, clear and uncontaminated water as it has been described in the inscription of Bharavi." Delving in the famous poet's geneaology further, K. C. adds that "Vijayasvamini (Dhruvasvamini) was the grandmother of Bharavi."

It is further assumed that during the "dark period" marked by a power-scramble following the death of king Mana-deva I and Vijayasvamini, Bharavi's father Deva-labha may have lost his life and his wife put the poet in a monastery to pursue his career as a *Shramana.*

But the term Shramana, if this scribe understands correctly, means a pilgrim or religious acolyte and has more of a Buddhistic overtone. This, added to the belief that to Mana-deva goes the credit for "heralding" Vajrayana (the Buddhist path of the Thunderbolt), a cult particularly popular in Nepal and the Himalayas, and K.C.'s assertion that "Bharavi made his Dvaipayana introduce the principles and practices of *Agama* to the court of king Yudhisthira", leads us to wonder if Bharavi was also a follower of Buddhism, besides being a great poet—and, 'certainly' a Nepali!

TRN, June 4, 1985

Piessel's Pranks



MUSTANG

A Lost Tibetan Kingdom

MICHEL PEISSEL

Collins and Harvill Press

LONDON [illegible]

The readers of this essay have, else-where in these pages, gone through examples of misinformation on Nepal culled out of pages of some 'standard' reference books. Here I am back in the game, once again, with yet some more such instances. And, this time, the relevant excerpts are torn right out of the pages of an "expert's" account of Nepal, namely, "The Great Himalayan Passage". The "expert" in question is Micnel Piessel of "Mustang: A Lost Himalayan Kingdom" fame!

"Although the Gurkhas were recruited from all the twentyfive tribes which constitute the population of Nepal, the British had soon formed a preference for four tribes of Tibetan origin—the Gurungs, the Magars, the Rais, and the Limbus", writes he at one place. How he came to the figure of "twentyfive" in respect of the "Nepalese tribes" is best known to himself!

Elsewhere, he goes on to say, "Very short, ...Rai faces look far more Mongolian than those of the Tibetans, or even the Mongolians,". No comments, pass on!

Having visited areas like Mustang at least twice in the course of his sujourns in Nepal, one would have imagined that Piessel, at least, was familiar with Hindu shrines like Muktinath almost next to the Nepal-Tibet border and, what's more, in the Mustang area itself!. But no. He is perhaps unaware even of Kathmandu's myriad Hindu temples, for he has this to say of Barah Chhetra: "On the way, we stopped at Barachhetra, a Hindu shrine which marked the northern limit of the Hindu religion". Whoever heard that Barah Chhetra, right in the south of Nepal near the Indian border, formed the "northern limit" of Hinduism?

"When I arrived fifteen years ago", so goes another utterly misleading, if not mischievous, statement: "there were no telephones in the (Kathmandu) valley, practically no cars, not one truck..." To those familiar with the Nepalese scene, this is nothing if not a canard. This he wrote in 1972, and, from his own account, he was in Nepal earlier in the late, Fifties. Would any of my elderly readers believe that there were "no cars, not one truck", in Kathmandu at the time? We have it on the authority of Sirdar Bhim Bahadur Pande that there were no less than 500 cars in Kathmandu even in 1955. Was Piessel blind-folded, then, when he visited Nepal around the same time? And what about the telephones? It is common knowledge that many houses in Kathmandu had phones even during the Rana regime (i.e., before 1950)!

"On New Year's Day, April 12th, ceremonies were staged in all the towns and villages of the Valley, where great crowds gathered to witness the holy Jackneys (magician-priests) plead for rain and foretell the future", Piessel goes on. It is obvious that he means "Jhaankris", not "Jackneys". But even then, has anyone ever seen or heard the *Jhaankris* officiating in Nepal's New Year Day functions? And, that too,. "to plead for rain"?

And whoever heard too, that "the new Chinese road built in 1963 which links Kathmandu with Lhasa in Tibet, is closed to all foreigners and most Nepalese"? But that's exactly what the prank-prone Piessel says!

Here is another astounding revelation: "Brahmins...range from Thakuri Branmins (warriors), through the Chhetri"...etc. One is thus led to believe that Thakuris are Brahmins, and so are the Chhetris. Also, that the Brahmins are the "warrior castes" of Nepal! The utter absurdity, or even foolishness, of such an utterance is too clear to need any countering.

Piessel goes on: "A young daughter is considered a sacred object...a son is naturally considered even more sacred, since he alone can aid his father after death to cross the limbo of the spirits into paradise...Indeed,a Brahmin with no children will often adopt a little girl, just for the merit derived from marrying her off". But having said that "a son is considered even more sacred than a daughter", Piessel does not explain why it is that Brahmins "often adopt a girl" in preference to a boy! I, a Brahmin by birth (tho not by vocation) myself. for one, would be tempted to tell this "expert", Piessel, to at least get his facts straight before writing books such as this one.

Ever heard, dear readers, that Hinduism was getting the better of Buddhism in India? And did you know the reason thereof? I bet you haven't, but Piessel knows better! He says: "The social attraction of the (Hindu) caste system is so great that today there are practically no Buddhists left in India, and Hinduism is spreading all over the subcontinent". To all of us Hindus who consider the caste-system the greatest single social evil, the statement that it is this very system that "attract" Buddhists has certainly come as a great news. But so what? An "expert" is an "expert" particularly if he is light-skinned Who are we to challenge him?

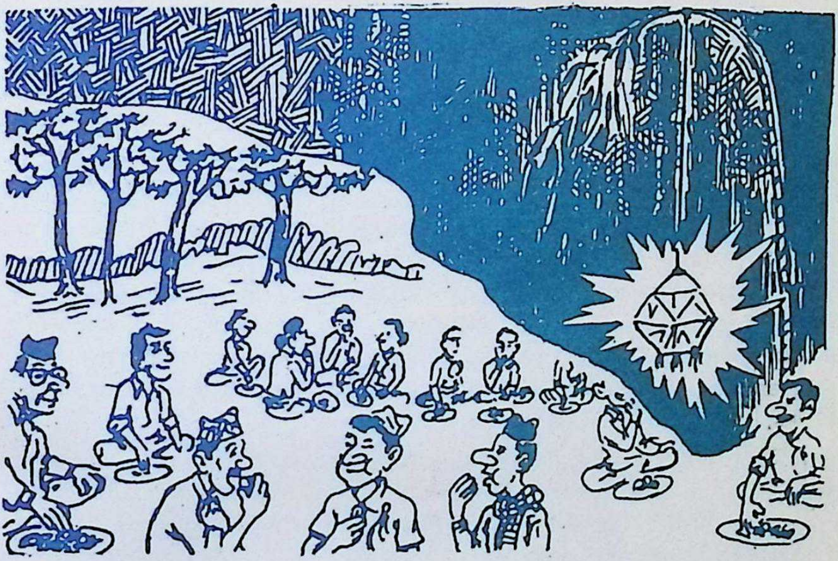
"A Gurung apparently places all his wealth upon his wife, and most of these ladies have as many rings they can offord on their fingers, huge discs attached to the lobe of their ears, little discs sewn into the top of the ear, and one or sometimes two large rings in their noses, not to mention innumerable bracelets and pendants," writes Piessel. It is astonishing that he witnessed these practices—and ornaments—only amongst the Gurungs, and not amongst others, despite the fact that it is almost a universal practice here.

At many a place, Piessel drops in hints that he is well-versed with the Tibetan language. Having given us to understand, at one place, that the word "Tamang" is derived from Tibetan and that it means "many horses", he goes on to say, elsewhere, that "the Tamang language differs from the Tibetan more than the Magar language"! Can you beat that one?

Also, the meaning of the term Tamang, as given by Santibir Lama, a reputed Tamang himself, differs from Piessel's in so far as it stands for "cavalrymen", not "many horses".

Mis-spellings like Gora Pani (for Ghode Pani), Deveghat (for Devighat) Machupuchari (for Machha-puchhare), Ghurka (for Gurkha) abound in the book under reference. But they can be simply ignored. What can't so easily be ignored, however, is another great verdict that Piesel has passed on the Botes (or Botays): "The Dunwar, Maji and Darai tribesmen, collectively know as Bots, live by fishing". Once again, this is far too Charlatan-like a statement to call for any comments!

A 'Picnic' Month



Traditionally, the month of *Mangshir* (November-December) is also a 'picnic' month for the Nepalese hillfolk. Why a particular month in a year should be so specified and why most people should make it a point to go for routined and organised outings during these 30-odd days may appear curious, if not intriguing. But the reasons are obvious.

For one thing, *Mangshir* or *Maargashirsha*, in ancient times, was regarded as the first month in the Hindu calendar year. Otherwise also known as **Agrahaayan** (the Terai people still refer to it as *Agahan*), it literally stands for the First Month *(Agra* preceding *Haayan* month.) It is not for nothing that Lord Krishna, while referring to his various personal attributes, says in the *Geetaa*: "Among the months. I am the *Maargashirsha*".

It is often said that the Hindus are guided by the Lunar calendar as far as their religious observances are concerned. We have, for instance, our *Aunshis* (new-moon nights) and *Purnimaas* (full-moon nights), our *Shuklapakshas* (bright fortnights) and *Krishnapakshas* (dark fortnights), etc., that guide us throughout the year.

But, a more than cursory glance at our ancestral practices will make it abundantly clear that the Solar calendar had been as much in vogue in the olden times as the Lunar one. Only that, while the Lunar calendar year started with the festival of *Lakshmi Puja* (otherwise also known as *Diwaali* or *Tihaar*), the Solar one started from the month of *Chait* or *Chaitra* (March-April).

It is also of interest to note that the *Vikrama* Era or *Samvat* (the Nepalese official calendar) used to mark its beginning with the *Lakshmi Pujaa* day (in the fall) itself, unlike, as in the present, with the First of *Baisaakh* (April-May). The calendar year beginning in Chaitra was the *Saka Samvat*.

Another point worth mentioning here is that, it was often the *Amaavashyaas* (Aunshis) that marked the completion of a particular month, and not the *Purnimaas*. The months were thus known as *Amantas* (literally meaning ending in *Ama*, or *Aunshi)*.

That the completion of the dark fortnight on the *Lakshmi Puja* day also heralds the beginning of the first month of the following calendar year is also evidenced from the way *Tihaar* is celebrated in many Hindu communities. For the Newars, for instance, it is the New Year's Day, as is familiar to anyone living in Kathmandu and its suburbs. The Marwadi and Bengali tradesmen also close their annual business accounts on this day and start operating new ledger books, befitting a New Year's Day.

"Ringing out the Old, ringing in the New," is a common-enough saying in the West. Church bells, ringing in the midnight, pronounce the advent of the New Year elsewhere in the world. We in Nepal say it with *Deepawali* (Festival of Lamps), the bursting of crackers, and the like.

Are these New-Year festivities limited to the living? It seems not. For, judging by what goes on in many households during the month of *Kaartika*, one would imagine the heavenly deities and predeceased ancestors also make a bee-line to the Land of the Living in order to witness the mirth and merry-making. The tradition of lighting *Aakaash Deeps* (literally 'Sky-Lamps') is an instance in point.

These sky-lamps are often colourful festooned paper-box lanterns hung atop long bamboo poles placed at house-tops. It is said that these lamps which are oil-fed and lit every evening, serve as sign-posts for the dear departeds to locate their erstwhile earthly abodes as they descend from the heavens! This phenomenon of *Aakaash Deep* is fairly popular in Kathmandu, too, to this day.

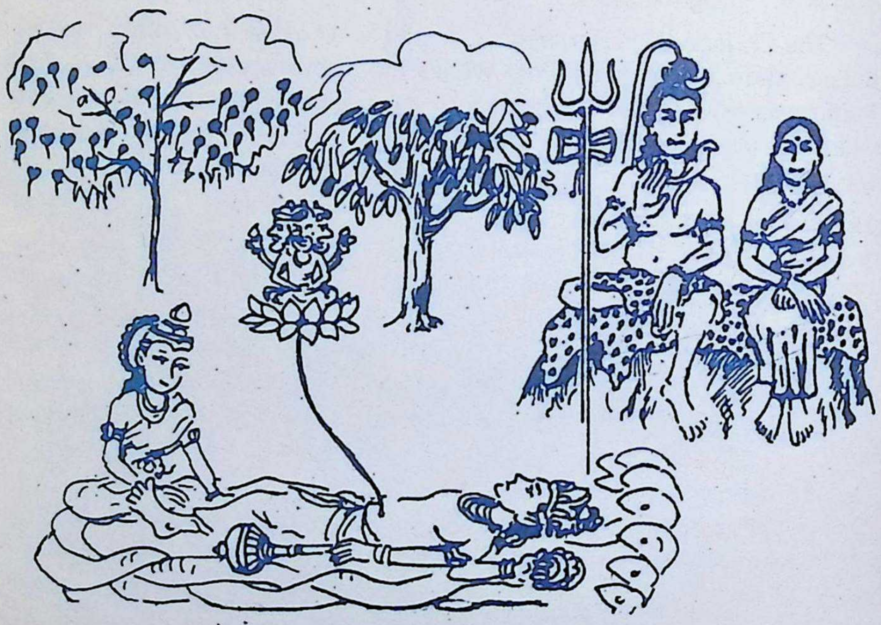
That these festivities should coincide with the months of *Kaartika* and *Mangshir* is understandable otherwise too. For, this is also the paddy-harvesting time, a time when the granaries are full, when the year-long toils in the fields are over—a time to rejoice.

In fact, the word *Lakshmi* ('Goddess of Wealth') aptly conjures up memories of the bountiful Mother Earth. *Lakshmi*, according to the *Rig Veda*, resides in the cow-dung, which, in turn, is the principal organic fertiliser that ensures better harvests. It stands to reason, therefore, that the Nepalese have set apart two days in the 5-day long *Tihaar* festival for the worship of the mother-cow and the bull—the latter, incidentally, being the farmer's principal aide in ploughing the fields.

The *Tihaar* festivities over, what next? The time now is, of course, ripe for outings and community-feasting! What's more, this is a season of "mellow fruitfulness"—with the trees laden with guavas, citrus fruits, persimons and what have you—and relaxation. It is appropriate, then, that the Nepalese have set aside a whole month—the month of *Mangshir*—for picnics!

TRN November 16, 1984

Environment And Our Ancients



A conservative estimate puts the annual depletion of forests, in the tropical countries alone, to the tune of 8 million hectares. A staggering figure indeed. In our own country too, experts presume, there may be no forests left towards the turn of this century if the present pace of deforestation goes unchekced. Even such fearful predictions, however, seem to have raised little general alarm, at least among the common people. Improved nature-conservation practices often receive no more than a lip-service, if they are not given a complete go-by.

It is worthwhile pondering, in this context, how the modern view of ecologists and nature conservationists finds ample and eloquent support in our religious texts, legends and lores. Our ancient sages and seers evolved a system of faith which imparts divinity to almost every plant, tree and even grass. They have also enjoined, at the same time, that we should consider plantlife as being equally valuable as human life. The need to restore the balance between Man and Nature, or, at least, not to disturb the ecological balance, is highlighted, for instance, in scriptures like the *Matsya Purana,* which, it is said, not only exhorts all people to plant trees in order to earn a heavenly merit, but also warns, on the other hand, that any harm done to any plantlife amounts to a religious sacrilege, a crime of the magnitude of murder itself!

That the Hindu and Buddhist philosophy of life imparts divinity to various plants and trees is evident from the esteem and reverence in which we hold the *Bar* and *Pipal* trees, among others. Both these trees are regarded as being the incarnations of Lord Vishnu and his divine consort, Lakshmi, or of Lord Shiva and his consort, Parvati. The Bel tree, likewise, serves as the very substitute of Lord Shiva, to be literally worshipped both during the annual *Shivaratri* ("The Night of Lord Shiva") festival and in the course of the month-long *Swasthani* fasting festival in the month of Magh (January-February). Why, the Newar community even regards the Bel as the incarnation of the Kumar (The Eternal Bachelor), as is evidenced in their popular social and religious ritual, the "Ihi", organised in order to mark the attainment, by the Newar girls, of puberty.

And there is the story of *Kalpabriksha*. This tree, which the Hindus believe was planted in Heaven, was supposed to bring all human wishes, including immortality, to fruition. Another focus of attention in many a Hindu myth and legend is the *Parijat* tree and flower, also known as the *Rudilo* or the Jasmine. A legend woven round Kathmandu's famous *Indra Jatra* festival has it that Lord Indra had once attempted to steal the *Parijat*, and had, with that end in view, taken a human form. The Kathmandu people caught him in the process of stealing, however, and had him imprisoned, but realising late that their prisoner was no other than Lord Indra himself, they not only let him go scot-free, but also organised the festival in his honour.

The banana and bamboo plants, in their turn, are said to symbolise the *Vatsu Devata* (God of the Household), and are regarded as indispensable in decorating houses and shrines as and when an auspicious ceremony, like a wedding, takes place. There is also the *Pancha Pallava*, a combination of five leaves or sprouts, that figure in our holy altars or form a leafy canopy over the puja *Mandapas*. Nor is a Hindu religious ritual complete without either the *Kusha* grass or the *Dubo* (Durva). In fact, a whole day in the annual Hindu calendar, namely the *Kushe Aunshi* (sometime in July-August), is even exclusively reserved for the ritual propitiation of the Kusha grass. The Dubo, in its turn, is said to represent Lord Ganesha, or the elephant-headed deity. Likewise, a Nepali *Dasain* festival without the omnipresent *Jamara* leaf and sprout growing from a receptacle, placed near the family altar and nurtured with love and devotion for nine consecutive days ending in the *Tika* day, would be difficult to imagine.

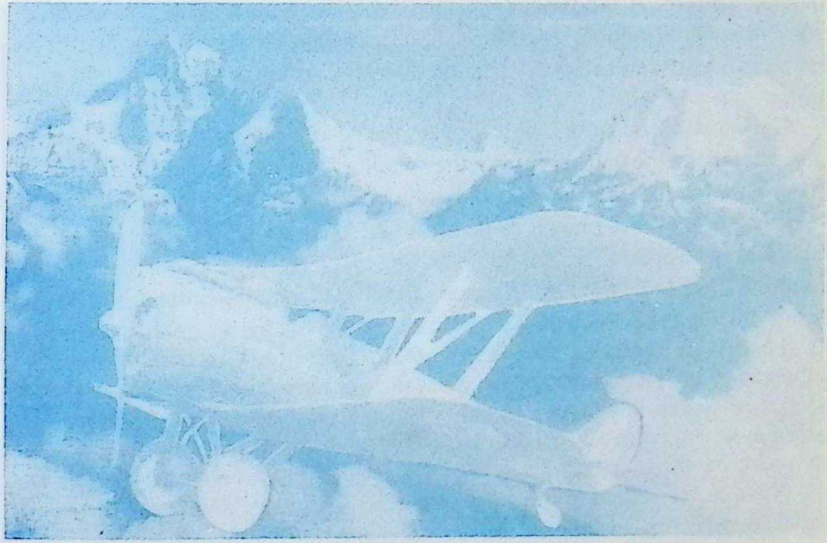
We can see, thus, that our ancestors have tried their utmost to inculcate in us a love and respect towards plants and trees of almost every hue. How else could our elders and predecessors have developed a spirit of adoration and reverence among their progeny towards the plant kingdom, given the generally unlettered and superstition-ridden society that ours is? The Jatakas and *Puranas* have also woven out countless stories designed to teach us nature conservation through the medium of religious rituals. Some of these stories are designed to impress on all people the absolute need for desisting from destroying natural heritage on the one hand and to plant, love and rear trees and forests to the utmost possible extent, on the other.

It is even said that the exigencies of life have scored over such niceties as love of nature, adoration of plant-life and the like. If, to the Lamaist Buddhists, holy chants like "Om Mani Padme Hum" (Hail, O Jewel in the Lotus) have remained mere prayers devoid of their inner significance, the Hindus, in their turn, have virtually forgotten the basic tenets taught by their scriptures which have always sought to highlight the importance of plant and vegetable kingdom by emphasising that even their Creator, Lord Brahma, himself was born out of a Lotus flower growing out of Lord Vishnu's navel.

Much as we may need environment and conservation education in order to imbibe in us, afresh, the lost cultural values such as love of natural resources in general and the plant kingdom in particular, the emphasis to be laid in such programmes, we think, should go beyond the narrow pale of conservation, economic and material benefits. The disastrous impact that lies in store for human civilisation as a result of our rampant and reckless destruction of the eco-system could perhaps be better explained to the generally unlettered majority of our people, with a mix with the mystic. The cultural and religious susceptibilities of the common man should not be given a go-by, that is.

TRN June 21, 1983

Did Nepal Build Its Own Aircraft?



The recent shooting down of a KAL airliner has sent shock waves throughout the globe. I am not trying to undermine this major tragedy or to make fun of it. But I can't help recollecting that Nepal, too, had once been involved in an "aircraft-shooting incident" of sorts!

I can't give you the exact date or the year of this incident, but it was positively in the 'Nineties of the last century, *Bikram Samvat*. You can guess, of course, that aeroplanes were themselves a rarity in those days, and, all the more so for Nepal, which hadn't any.

The 'shooting' incident is said to have occured thus: an aircraft, possibly British, had strayed into the Nepalese territory. Premier Juddha Shumshere, camping at Nagarjun at the time, saw the aircraft, and was worried that it may fly above the Pasupatinath temple. He promptly lifted his gun and shot at it. It didn't, of course, hit the aircraft; perhaps the pilots didn't even hear the crack of the gun. But this incident did give rise to a major diplomatic bullahoo!

And, indeed, Nepal had its reasons for 'shooting' at the aircraft. For, only as far back as in 1933/4, Lady Houston's British Expedition, led by the Marquess of Clydesdale, had made use of an aircraft to fly over the Mount Everest. Soon after, Nepal had been rocked by the severest earthquake of the century!

Interestingly, when Nepal did ultimately decide to build an airfield within the country, the site chosen was not Kathmandu as you may have guessed, but Simra near Birgunj! So, if today's aviation experts tell you, dear readers, that to Gauchar (presently the Tribhuvan International Airport) goes the credit of ushering in the aviation age in Nepal, don't simply believe them! The country's first airfield was built at Simra. That no aircraft ever landed there is a different matter...

Did we also 'build' our own aircraft in the past? Seemingly we did! But how far it differed, on the one hand, from the mythical *"Pushpak Viman"*, and, on the other, from modern jets, is beyond this scribe's conjecture. However, Mr. Tek Bahadur Khatri, a well-known Nepalese writer, has gone on record in his recent publication, "*Sayaun Sawal, Sayaun Jawaf*" ("A Hundred Questions, A Hundred Answers") that Nepal's ace scientist, Gehendra Shumshere Rana, was on the verge of developing a "flying machine", but for his untimely demise. Mr. Khatri also tells us of one Achyutanand, another contemporary of Gehendra, who had not only developed our own version of the aircraft, but also astounded everyone around by making the "aircraft" take off from Pachali, near Kathmandu, as far back as in 1915. Nepal, then, wasn't that backward and undeveloped those days, was it?

Now, to turn again to the story of the Simra airfield. What was the use of Nepal constructing an airfield if she had not owned even one aircraft?—you may well ask. You are right, but we must recall that those were not only the World War years; those were also the times of violent anti-British agitations throughout pre-independence India. Burning of trains and uprooting of railway tracks were a common phenomenon in the Indian states adjoining Nepal, often resulting in disruption of our vital supply lines that passed through Bengal and Bihar, much as they do also now.

Apprehending that disturbances along its southern borders might jeopardise Nepalese interests by stopping or diverting goods and supplies in transit to Kathmandu, premier Juddha approached the British Indian authorities to find out an alternative. The British, on their part, came out with an offer to build an airfield on this side of the Nepal-India border. Simra was the seemingly obvious choice.

Kathmandu promptly despatched two officials to undertake the "construction", and they, equally promptly, readied the 'airfield' in no time! (Both of them, I suspect, are still very much alive and kicking, though leading retired lives!).

But, somehow, there was no occasion for the British to make use of that airfiled, despite the fact that movement of essential goods did suffer, thereby pushing up market prices in Nepal and bringing about and all-round scarcity. Premier Juddha, considering this as a 'slight' to his country, promptly protested to the British Viceroy in India. The latter expressed regrets at Nepal's difficulties and officially apologised. The issue was then closed. This was around 1942-43.

Not directly connected with airfields and aircraft, but nonetheless connected with Nepal's annoyance at the earlier British Indian stance, was the issue of extradition of Indian freedom fighters who had then escaped into Nepal. Prominent among them were socialist leaders like late Jaya Prakash Narain and Ram Manohar Lohia. The British authorities' letters, asking for the extradition of some five hundred persons who had sought Nepal's political asylum, even contained veiled threats that India would not be responsible for anti-Rana movement in India, if it took shape. But Kathmandu did not budge. Nor did it surrender a German geologist, one Mr. Flitchner, despite repeated British requests. That was possibly the backdrop which led to British India's unconcerned attitude towards Nepal's difficulties in the matter of rushing essential supplies by air to Simra.* *TRN November 15, 1983*

* Mr. Dinesh Satyal, a young and enthusiastic colleague, subsequently came u a write-up he had located in an earlier issue of "Madhuparka", a Nepalese monthly, which throws an entirely new light on the subject of Nepal-made "aircrafts". It may be of interest to the readers as to what the said write-up, by Shashi, has to say. Abridged excerpts:

"A certain Totranath Pandey one day approached General Pratap Jung Rana and announced that he had developed a 'flying machine'.

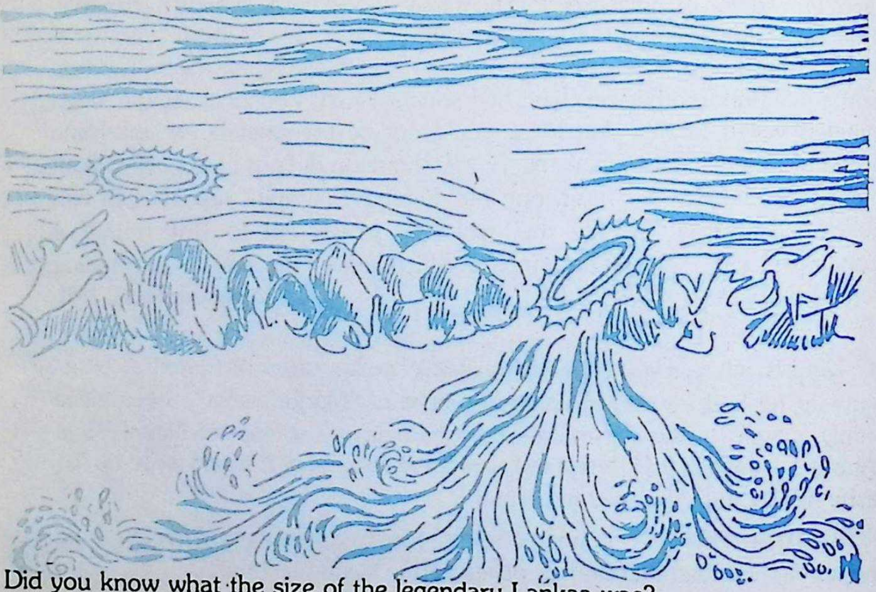
"Two days later, the General went to see the flying experiment at Pachali (near downtown Kathmandu). Totranath said that his 'aeroplane' could accommodate four persons, but no one present volunteered to take the ride...

"Totranath then boarded the machine all alone, and soon was airborne, flew above and across the *Kaalo Pool* ('Black Bridge'), before returning at slow speed and re-landing at Pachali. The flabbergasted General commanded that the machine be made to fly over the Bagmati Bridge as well. The aeroplane took off again, flew above the present-day Bamgati bridge and returned.

"A pleased General rewarded Totranath, on the spot, with Rs. 200/-. Some others who had gathered there to witness the unique event, also rewarded him. Totranath may have collected Rs. 700/- on that day.....

"But the then premier wasn't at all pleased about Totranath's invention. On the other hand, he ordered that the machine be destroyed forthwith as it had been built without prior clearance or permission. Totranath was also sentenced to a six-year jail-term."

The Other Bhrikuti?



Did you know what the size of the legendary Lankaa was?

According to Lord Vishwakarma (The Divine Architect) who is credited to have built it, it was 100 ***Yojanas*** (800 miles) in length and 30 ***Yojanas*** (240 miles) in breadth. "Unapproachable even by the birds, and chiselled with a *Chhino* on all sides, the city of Lankaa was designed by me at the instance of Lord Indra. It is full of gold and jewels", said the Architect.

While expressions like "unapproachable even by the birds" and "chiselled on all sides" allude to the possibility of Lankaa having been a remote island rather than a "city", there is no way of identifying this legendary land with modern Sri Lanka. What's more, there is a strong school of historic thought that holds, on the strength of some "recent researches", that the present - day Sri Lanka wasn't, it fact, the Lankaa as referred to in the famous Raamaayana epic as the abode and capital of king Ravana.

Not being a historian, it is not my intention to enter into that controversy. What is of much greater interest to me, however, is the fact that Lord Vishwakarma's statement above - quoted appears in, of all things, a seemingly medieval, if not exactly ancient, treatise, the "*Nepal Mahaatmya*".

As the tittle of the book (roughly translatable as "Greatness of Nepal") suggests, it should have dwelt on Nepal at a much greater length and in greater detail. Curiously enough, however, it does not even give us an idea of what it exactly means by "Nepal", or, in other words, the shape or size of the "city" or "country" that was Nepal and whose greatness the book seeks to extol!

But, with the help of some oblique hints dropped therein, we can assume that the "Nepal" it talks of extends, at best, to the river Kausiki (Sun Kosi?) in the east, the river Trisuli in the west, the Shivapuri mountain in the north and the river Shitalodaka (Chisaapaani?) in the south. Be that as it may, however, the book is replete with references of practically every single notable Hindu deity (Lord Buddha not excluded) who are said to have either visited, or resided, in Nepal.

The sage Vaalmiki, for instance, is said to have authored the "Raamaayana" epic while residing in Nepal! Lord Indra, in his turn, established a "Shivalinga" at Amaraavati. The legendary Vaasuki Naaga had come from the netherworld ("Paataal") and settled here. Sage Vishwamitra is said to have set up a famous "Linga" at the confluence of the rivers Kosi and Rosi, while the Kumbheshwar temple ("Linga"), was established by none other than sage Agastya himself[!] Etc.etc.

Interesting also is the story of King Ravana of Lankaa having undergone an extremely dreadful penance that included the voluntary cutting - off of nine (out of his ten) heads -- but where? One would be surprised to learn that the site of this incredible penance was *Shankhamool* and Gokarna -- familiar places for Kathmanduites even today.

Another interesting sidelight that emerges from this book appears not so convincing, however. We have known, on historical evidence, that Lord Buddha hailed from Lumbini, in south-western Nepal. But a passage in the *"Nepal Mahaatmya"* (Chap. 39, pp. 278) would have us believe that Lord Buddha settled here on arival from "Mahaachin" (the 'Great China')!

Now, for a slight diversion. It has almost been a matter of faith for us Nepalese to regard Bhrikuti as a celebrated daughter of Nepal who is said to be revered as a goddess in Tibet to this day. It is, of course, a different thing that historians like L'evy and Dr. Regmi cast doubts about the authenticity of the Bhrikuti legend. But, even beleiving that Bhrikuti as a person did exist, it wouldn't do us good to forget two other legendary ladies who had acted as Nepal's cultural ambassadors much earlier in prehistory--and are similarly revered in foreign lands.

One of them, of course, was Sita, the Mithilan princess married to Lord Raama of Ayodhya. Another, though much lesser-known, was Chandraavati (*alias* Prabhaavati?), daughter of a "Nepalese" king of Shivapuri named Satyaketu.

According to the *Nepal Mahaatmya,* Mahendradaman, a very powerful ***Daitya*** and son of Vaanaasur, had made himself the master of all three celestial worlds after vanquishing Lord Indra and the other gods. He then built for himself the beautiful capital city of Suprabhaa. So powerful, indeed, was he that he had also blocked the passage of the river Bagmati, thereby converting the entire area of the Shleshmaantaka forest into a huge lake.

Once Mahendradman sought the hands of Prabhaavati in marriage, but sage Naarada prevailed upon king Satyaketu to marry his daughter off to Pradyumna, son of Lord Krishna. The latter also agreed to the proposal and sent Pradyumna, along with Naarada, from Dwaarakaapuri to Chandragiri in Nepal.

But, of course, Mahendradaman was the major road-block that hindered the solemnisation of the wedding. Hence Pradyumna prepard to fight him, and, aided by Lord Krishna himself (who also set up the Gopaaleshwar Linga), slew Mahendradman and his two brothers Sankha and Kachchhapaasur (or Viraadh), demolished with his *Chakra* the dam built earlier by the *Daityas* to block the passage of Bagmati and thereby released the waters of the lake. King Satyaketu commemorated this historic victory of Krishna and Pradyumna by constructing the image of Narayana sleeping on a serpent in the centre of the land thus formed.

Prabhaavati, who then left for Dwaaraka to live with her husband and was raised to the pedestal of a goddess by subsequent Hindu generations, can, therefore, be regarded as another precursor of Bhrikuti, if ever there was one !

Where Was Kailashkuta?

The recent HMG-ISMEO archaeological excavations in Kathmandu's Handigaon and Dhumvarahi areas have once again underscored the importance historical researchers have attached to this archaeologically potential area. Articles discovered there last month, for instance, included a *purnakalasha*, some ancient figurines, Lichchhavi coins, *Makara* spouts and the like, thus alluding to the possibility of still richer treasures being unearthed later, that may unravel many an ancient mystery.

One such mystery—if it can be called one—surrounds the celebrated Kailashkuta palace of Angshuverma and its possible location, and controversies haven't ceased raging amongst scholars and historians on this issue.

The more common belief is that the present-day Kailash ridge above the Pashupatinath temple is, in fact, an abbreviation of the word Kailashkuta, and, as such, no ground for raising any further controversy exists. Not all scholars support this contention, however.

But before we try to find out what historians have to say about its alternative site, a physical description of whatever little of it is available to us may be in order. A stone inscription at Bungmati, credited to the 6th century king Angshuverma and dated Manadeva Era 29 (V.S. 562 or 505 A.D ?), is said to describe the palace as the "cynosure of all eyes", whose splendour kept people gazing at it in awe and appreciation without as much as batting an eyelid! So utterly beautiful was this structural marvel that it could be likened to a *Tika* on the "forehead of the Mother Earth."

"This most exquisite of the world's palaces is a feast for the eyes and resembles a snow-white mountain, washed with moon-shine, and rising high into the sky", goes another description.

Even foreigners, it is said, used to gape in wonder at the sight of this marvellous piece of architecture. A Chinese pilgrim, for instance, has been quoted by a noted researcher on the subject, Gyanmani Nepal, as having expressed his appreciation in the following vein:

"So huge was the *Kailashkuta Bhavan* that it could accommodate 10,000 persons in the upper storey alone. It was surrounded on three sides by other palaces, each, again, seven storeys high.

"The roofs," continues the approbation, "were made of copper; golden water-spouts placed at the eaves and roof-corners were shaped like the snouts of crocodiles that kept on emitting fountain-springs of water. The supporting beams and pillars, windows and walls, were inlaid with costly stones like *muga*, pearls and the like...Nowhere else could one come across as beautiful and artistic a palace as this one."

A school of historical thought holds the view that, of the two famous palaces during the rule of the ancient Lichchhavis, one was 'Mana Griha'— attributed to emperor Mana Deva himself, and the other, "Kailashkuta", possibly built and occupied by Angshuverma as the prime minister. It is said that *Mana Griha* was located around the present-day Mangal Bazar in Patan and kailashkuta near the present-day Deopatan, at the base of the Kailash ridge above-referred, on the banks of the Bagmati.

Another stone inscription, said to have been discovered at Naksal Narayan Chour some six kilometers west of Deopatan, and first deciphered by the noted historian, L'evi, however, points to the possible existence of a citadel or *drung* at the same spot and a "so-called" Maneshwar village nearby. Mr. Nepal holds, on the strength of L'evi's findings, that the site of Kailashkuta palace couldn't have been far removed from the temple of Man Manneshwari (or the present-day Handigaon near Bishalnagar), should this temple be identified with its nameske village of Maneshwar.

This later contention seems to find further corroboration in the fact that two more stone inscriptions, both attributed to Angshuverma, have also been discovered and lie embedded on the walls of a *dabali*-platform nearby, and date back to Manadeva Era 30 and 32 respectively.

Two years prior to this, i.e. till the year 28 of the Mandeva Era Angshuverma had, it is said, been issuing edicts in the capacity of Minister of the Lichchhavi King, Shivadeva. The 'fact' that he started issuing edicts not from Managriha (or the palace of Lichchhavi kings) but from a separate Kailashkuta palace some 2 years later goes to indicate, according to Mr. Nepal , that in the period intervening, Angshuverma must have assumed the regal title himself and probably moved on to his new official residence, namely, the Kailashkuta Bhavan.

Concludes Mr. Nepal, "Those two stone inscriptions, unlike all others attributed to Angshuverma, bear no *dutak* (or medium?) and thereby go to indicate that they had been placed nowhere other than the palace-precincts itself. Which, in its turn, is proof positive' that, despite it having been lost to posterity due to the ravages of time, the Kailashkuta Bhavan was located at the same place and no other."

Added to this is the fact, says the author, that some bricks with the word "Angshuverma" inscribed on them, have also been unearthed recently near Handigaon. We only hope that the current excavations being conducted in the area will go to further strengthen this contention or, alternatively, act as a pointer to something new and more interesting.

TRN January 18, 1985

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The Rama Story In Tibet

Readers of this column have had the occasion, some months ago, of savouring the Sita story in the Bhojpuri version. This time we will cast a cursory glance at the same Ramayana story as is presented to the Tibetan readers through the various versions available there.

While it would be pertinent to add here that, apart from the Ten Haang version, there are also the Maar-chhong, Jay-dun-tel and Rin-Spung-pa versions prevalent in Tibet. Since most versions, basically do not differ from the all-too-common Ramayana story in most details, it would perhaps suffice here to limit ourselves with the variations in the various versions. Another point worth mentioning is that, as one of these versions is referred to in a biography of Atisha who had been to Tibet in and around 1040 A.D., and which was re-written, in the extant from, between 1257 and 1496, it is safe to conclude that the Rama story was not unknown in Tibet in the 10th century AD or even earlier.

Both the Maar-chhong and the older Tung Haang versions reveal interesting differences. The Maar-chhong versions refers to Bhimsen as the third brother of Raman and Lakumaa. The name of Bharat is nowhere mentioned in either versions. And, unlike in the Tung Huang, Marutse does not convert himself into a golden deer in mentioned, of course, but only as a mirage created by Dasagriva, Yaksokovi or Tisay Giri (i.e., Raavana).

Rama has been described as having come to the assistance of Sugriva in hisfist-fight with Baali. While the Tung version has it that a piece of mirror was tied to Sugriva's tail in order to help Raman identify him easily, the Maar-chhong version shows the mirror as having been tied to Sugriva's forehead. Also, when the demons of Lanka put Hanuman's tail on fire, the Naagas of the sea are shown as coming to his rescue, according to the Maar-chhong, but not the Tung version.

Another more popular version known as Jay-dun-fel, is also said to have been published from Thimpu, the Bhutanese capital, in 1976, though aspart ofa different treatise. An interesting difference visible in this version is that Sita is described as the daughter of Raavana himself, whom he had discarded at her birth and who had later been married to Raama. Ignorant that Sita was his own progeny, Raavana abducts her.

While Sita's search was on, Raama arrives at a river, which is not only muddy, but its water warm and stinking. It is so because two monkey-kings are engaged in a physical bout at its banks and their perspiration has made the water stink. Two very elderly monkey-women, keeping vigil, happen to be mothers of the two kings. One of these, that is Sugriva's mother, requests Raama to help her son ascend the throne by killing his adversary. Raman agree and a cowry shell is tied across Sugriva's head the next day,thus enabling Raman to kill the one not wearing the cowrie shell.

Now it is the monkey-king's turn to assist Raman in the.search for his lost wife. The monkey-troops reach the ocean, but find it impossible to cross to the other side where, in the Lanka island, lies the capital of Dasagriva. The monkey-king urges Raman to shoot an arrow into the air so that it drops on the shores of the island capital. A tiny monkey clings to the arrow, is tied to it, and is hurtled across the ocean as the arrow is shot.

Later, a bridge is constructed and the army of monkeys cross to the other side. But, once they confront the ten-headed Dasagriva, they lose heart: how can they possibly kill a ten-headed monster? Raman explains to them that it is a king of a mirage—a reflection in the precious stones embedded into the palace walls—that gives an impression of a multiplicity of heads. He also asks the doubting Thomases among the monkeys to take a closer look to convince themselves. And, lo, to their pleasant surprise, only one of the heads is warm and the rest are as cold a the stones that reflect them! Once thus conviced, the monkey-king finds its easy to vaniquish Dasagriva.

Raman, is his turn, churns the ocean with his giant bow and thus kills all the demons. Indra, friend of the demons, showers hundreds of arrows from the heaven, killing all the members of the monkey-army. But, later, afraid that Raman may take a serious revenge, he sprinkles nectar so as to enable the monkeys to be revived again.

The Tung Huang version also has it that Dasagriva, in the course of his meditation to appease Lord Mahadeva and obtain a boon, had one of his ten heads cot off as an offering to the Lord. Mahaadeva's wife, Upadey, or Upaney, would like to 'transfer' her prowess to the remaining heads, but they would have none of a "woman's prowess", as they derisively call it. An infuriated Upadey curses them to the effect that a woman would be the cause of their ruin and extermination.

Lord Vishnu is re-born as Raman and his son as Raman's brother, Lagoan.

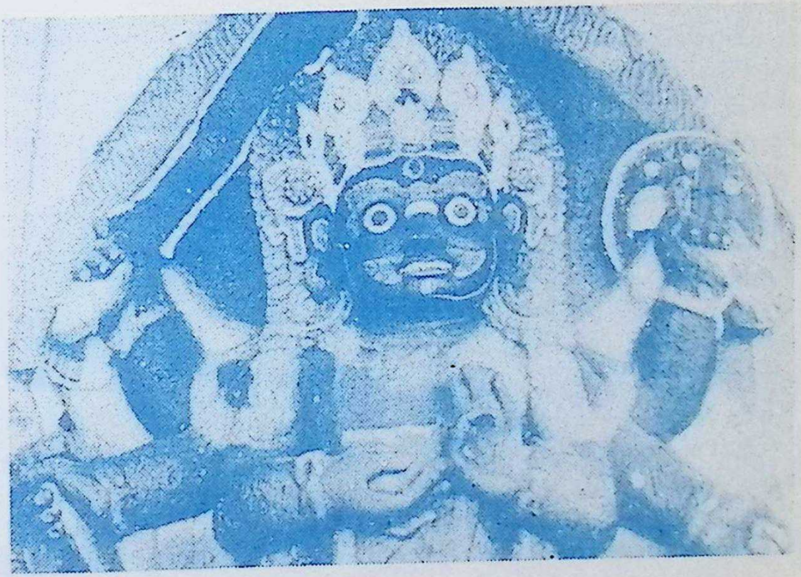
Around the same time, a daughter is born to Dasagriva. But as it is prophesied that she would bring about his ruin and downfall, she was put inside a copper container and cast into the river. Some farmers come to her rescue, raise her up, name her Noredmaa and get her married to Raman, who renames her Sita.

Another interesting departure is that it is not Bharata (who nowhere figures as Raama's third brother anyway!) but Ragsona who ascends the throne following Raman's exile. During the years of exile, Raman comes into contact with Purpal, a sister of Dasagriva, who, despite her extreme infatuation towards Raman, is spurned by him. Thus insulted, Purpal urges her brother to abduct Sitaa and make her his wife.

One last departure from the main Ramayana legend is worth noting before weconclude.For, what Raman gives Hanumanta for passing on to Sitaa is not a ring but a letter. Sita also, in return, replies to Raman is writing, and hands it over to Hanumanta.

Also, unlike in the original story, Lava and Kusa, the two sons of Rama, are not born to Sita after she had been exiled to the forest, but actually accompanied their mother to the forest. And, when Lava was lost one day, the sages in the forest created his replica out of the *Kusha* grass!

Of "Standard" Reference Works!



It often becomes necessary to turn the pages of standard reference works and we all do so at one time or the other. But at times even these "standard" works are found to contain information that is amusing rather than illuminating. A few instances will be cited here at random, and, in doing so, the entry on Nepal in the "Encyclopedia International" (Grolier Inc., New York, 1975) comes most readily to my mind.

It says, at one place (Vol. 12. pp. 535), that "Nepal was once ruled by Rajputs, and Nepali (the country's chief Indic language) *developed from Rajasthani*. Nepali also shows the influence of the Tibeto-Burman languages spoken by the majority of the people of Nepal" (Emphasis added). No comments, pass on!

The same book features a sizeable photograph of the huge and unmistakable blackstone *Kaal Bhairav* next to the Hanuman Dhoka. But (hold your breath!), the caption to this photograph makes the most interesting reading, and here it goes: "Young Buddhist monks stand in front of a huge stone sculpture of the Hindu goddess Kali, in Kathmandu!" From all appearances, the and the rest are as cold a the stones that reflect them! Once thus conviced, the monkey-king finds its easy to vaniquish Dasagriva.

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Samples of some other dubious accounts of Nepal appearing in Margaret Fisher's aforesaid write-up on Nepal: "The Magars and Gurungs (are) hillmen favoured as recruits to the famous British Gurkha battalions". Whether or not the writer has had much acquaintance with the Rais and Limbus is not immediately clear, but even if she had, she refers to them only very vaguely as "Kirantis—whose various sub-divisions are dominant in the Eastern hills".

Not only that "Nepal does not have a state religion", she writes on, and adds, perhaps for the benefit of those to whom this may come as a great piece of news, "but the majority of the population is Hindus".

Look at this one too: "the *coup d'etat* of 1885 onwards, successive Rana Prime Ministers yielded to increasing British pressure for Gurkha recruits, obtaining important advantages in return". Make your own guesses, by all means!

To anyone who has even a passing acquaintance with books on Nepal written by the Westerners, Leo E. Rose isn't an unfamiliar name, if a little mischievous one. The abbreviation "L.E.R." at the bottom of the entry on Nepal appearing in "Encyclopedia Americana" (Vol. 20, pp. 100) does also refer to no other than this 'great expert' on Nepal and Nepalese affairs, I presume.

But even if you may have heard of this name, what I bet you haven't heard is that there is a language called "Limbuani" in Nepal! Be also informed, dear readers, that "a substantial Muslim minority...is found in the eastern Nepal Terai area". Whoever has heard about the Muslims of Banke and Bardia in Western Nepal? It is also mentioned, elsewhere, that "under this de facto alliance (of 1860)...Kathmandu accepted British 'guidance' on foreign policy". Those of us, who have been fed mostly on despatches by British Residents and such other officials with the closest access to the Nepalese court for most of our lessons in Nepalese history must, for once, re-read some of them in the light of what Encyclopedia Americana has to say. The following one for instance, from Campbell: "Her (Nepal's) chiefs are not dependent on us, nor is she bound to ask or we to give counsel and advice, on any subject whatever. In short, Nepal is free and independent of the British power."

What is also interesting is that the history portion on Nepal in the "Encyclopedia Brittanica" and the entry on Nepal in the "Encyclopedia Americana" do perhaps come from the same pen. The following lines, for example, are almost identical in both: "In December 1960, conflict arose between King Mahendra, who began his reign in 1955, and the cabinet, (which) led to the cabinet's dismissal, imprisonment of many...leaders, and the suspension of the constitution". No need is felt, in either case, to identify the "conflict" however, nor whether the constitution, if "suspended", was ever restored!

Coming once again to "the most authentic" among standard reference books, namely, the "Encyclopedia Brittannica," one is constrained to say that it shows its slips too. This one, for instance, is remarkable for its looseness of expression: "Hindu kings claiming high-caste India origin, ruling over a population that was (is) neither Indo-Aryan or Hindu in ethnic origin".

Thanks to this time-honoured publication, however, we get to know terms like "Tibeto-Nepalese" (in preference to the more hackneyed "Tibeto-Burman"—which is less suitable to Nepali context anyway!) in describing population groups like the "Tamangs, Rais, Limbus, Bhote and Sunwar", despite the misleading impression the word "and" gives us in this context. But, having paid the plaudits, one is inclined to suggest that "Indo-Nepalese" would have been a more matching term to use in place of the "Indo-Aryan" (or Margaret Fisher's "Indic", for that matter).

Galore are such reference books, which deserve a closer scrutiny. But constraints of space do limit a more elaborate exercise in this essay. We may, however, make a passing reference to the Penguin Encyclopedia of Places (1971) which, among other things, dates the "foundation" of Kathmandu to the "18th Century"!

To conclude, one even comes across such other "standard" reference works like "Asia—A Regional and Economic Geography", by Sir Dudley Stamp (London: Metheun & Co. Ltd.), a 750-page compedium that does not even find a place for Nepali in its list of Asian countries. Not in its first edition (1929), not even in its 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th, editions running right upto 1966! Nepal simply did not, or does not, exist in Asia as far as this well-known "reference" book is concerned!*

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*Yet another well-known reference work on the flags of the world, describes the Nepalese flag (pp. 200) as "two triangular pennants, one above the other.... those consist of the representation of the crescent moon in the upper part, and the sun in the lower part." So far, so good. But thereafter comes a rather amusing statement even in its 1978 edition, thus: "The crescent represents the royal house, and the sun the Rana family, who were hereditary prime ministers of the country until November 1961" (?)

But no other reference work startles us more than the Concise Columbia Encyclopaedia (1983) when it says in what may be termed a classic misstatement (pp. 590): “Nepal was granted independence in 1923 and a limited constitutional monarchy was established in 1951.” It is, of course, silent on who “gave” Nepal its independence!

Though not a reference work proper, “The Century of the Surgeon” by Jurgen Thorwald, doesn’t lag behind the others when it says Kirtipur is in Ceylon, thus: “Carpue at that time had not yet read about the city of Kirtipur in Ceylon, which was captured in 1770 by Protwinarajan. the King of Ghorkha!”

* *

From Ape To The Original Man

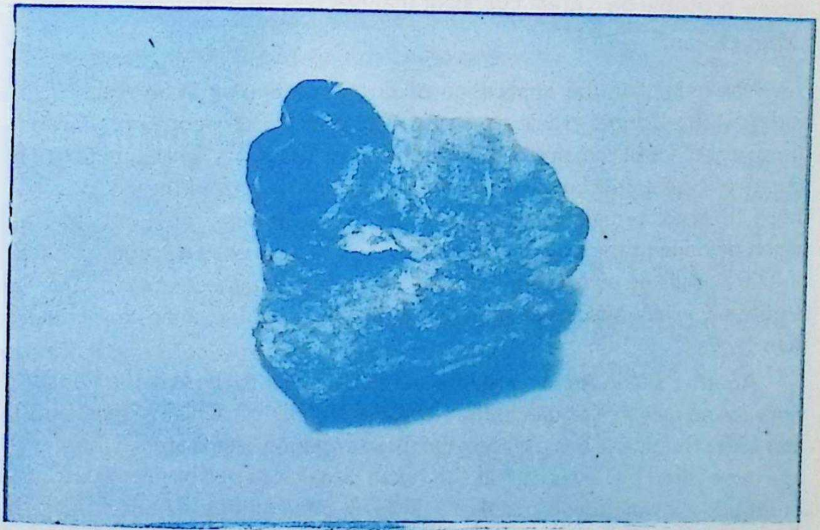


Photo depicting the left upper tooth of the Butwalpithecus

Did the prehistoric Man originate in Asia? Even more precisely, can Nepal claim the credit for giving birth to the world's First Man?

These are a few interesting questions that emanate from some writings recently published, notable among them being an article appearing in a **recent** issue of "Garima", a literary monthly, and written by the well-known Nepali litterateur, Janak Lal Sharma. **The** said article purports to be a follow-up on yet another recently-published scholarly treatise, "Hamro Samaj: Ek Adhyayan" (Our Socity: A Study) by the same author.

References cited in the course of the essay above-referred themselves run into a formidable list of twenty-five titles, varying from short articles to voluminous books, including Haddon's "History of Anthropology" and "Encyclopedia Britannica" on the one hand and Jia Lanpo's "Early Man in China", published by the Foreign Language Press, Beijing, in 1980, on the other.

In support of his contention that the prehistoric Man's connection can be traced to parts of Asia, the author, for instance, quotes the following passage from the well-known sociologist and paleontologist, Frederick Angels:

"Many hundreds of thousand of years ago, during an epoch not yet definitely determinable...(during) that period of the earth's history which geologists call the Tertiary, and most likely towards the end of it, a particularly highly-developed species of anthropoid apes lived somewhere in the Tropical zone—probably on a great continent that has now sunk into the bottom of the Indian Ocean."

Not only that the implication of Engel's statement is far-reaching, the author of the *Garima* article contends, it also finds further corroboration in the discovery of fossil remains of *Ramapithecus* or the Rama Ape belonging to the Upper Miocene and Lower Pliocene periods in this part of the world. What's more, the fossil remains of yet another creature, whom we can liken to Man and which belongs to the Lower Pliestocene period, have been discovered in parts of Asia as well, he adds. And, according to him, *Ramapithecus* or the Rama Ape is not only a rare species of Hominidae, but also the direct ancestor of modern man.

Another site in Asia where fossil remains similar to those of the Rama Ape were found was in Kaiyuan in the People's Republic of China, between 1957 and 1958. But as the basic features of these creatures also matched those of the ape discovered by Lewis earlier, they were also designated by the generic name of *Ramapithecus Punjabicus*. Again, in 1978, some other fossil remains bearing more or less similar characteristics were discovered in Lufeng, also in the People's Republic of China, besides those found in Pakistan.

Coming nearer home, Dr J.H. Hutchson was credicted with the discovery of yet another fossil in Nepal's south-western Butawal area as late as in December 1980. A news item appearing in 'The Rising Nepal' daily dated Friday, March 27, 1981, confirmed this discovery. Summarised, the news-item read:

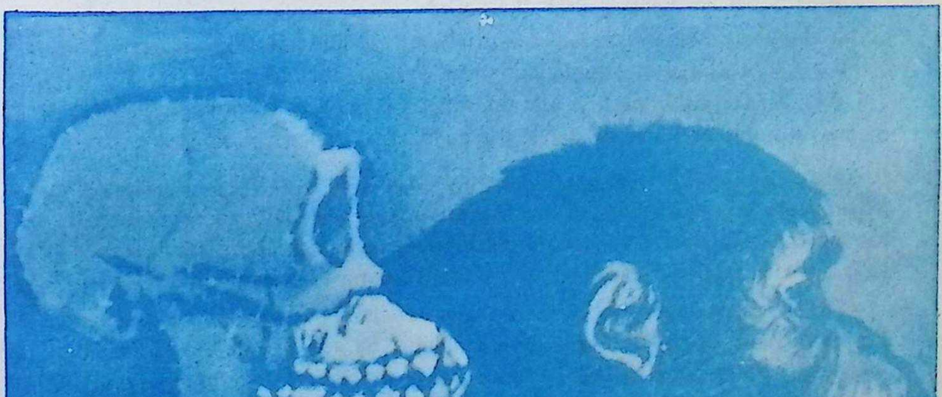
"A Nepalese-American joint scientific team has discovered a left upper tooth belonging to the jaw of *Ramapithecus*. The discovery was made in December 1980 on a hillside, a few miles away from Butawal, on the banks of the Tinau river."

While the fossil remains of the Rama Ape discovered in Kenya are said to have been at least fourteen million (14,000,000) years old, those of the Butawal *Ramapithecus* have been estimated as being some thirty lakh (or 3 million) years younger. But, as similar discoveries in India and Pakistan have been considered to be of a much later date, the author claims that, in Asia at least, the Butawal Rama Ape should be considered earliest in order of time.

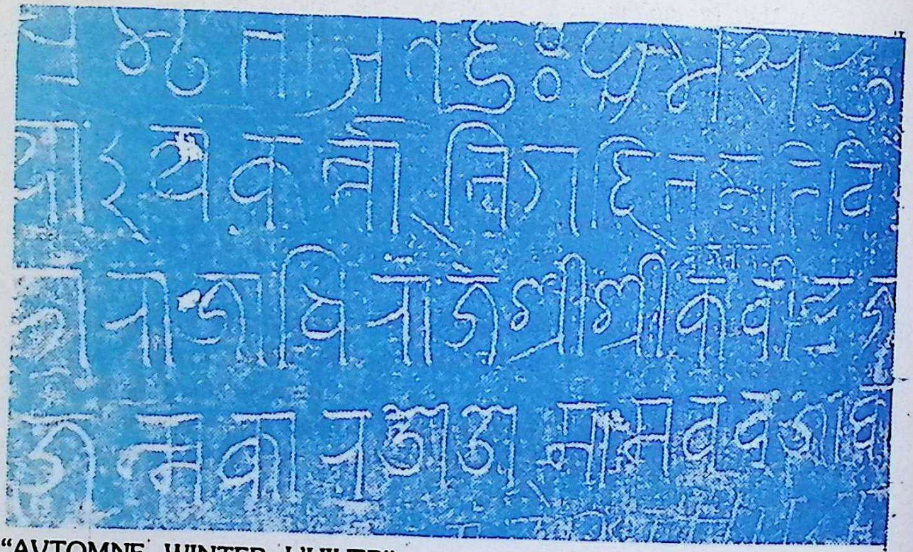
Though, even today, scholars are engaged in Taxonomical classification of the various Rama Ape fossil discoveries, there is a general consensus amongst them that the *Ramapithecus* is, by all available indications, Man's first real ancestor, and it comes closest to the *Homo sapiens* in all its basic physical characteristics.

The *Ramapithecus,* scholars presume, must have been a semi-erect creature. It vanished from the face of the earth some 7 million years ago. This Simian ancestor of Man is regarded to be more manlike than most other similar anthropoid apes, or, in other words, it is this ape that crossed the Anthropoid threshold and advanced one step ahead towards the development of the *Hominidae.*

On the basis of the above indications, and, as most of the fossil remains of the *Ramapithecus* were discovered in various parts of Asia, it will not be too far off the mark to presume that Asia was one of the homes of the original Man. And, since fossil discoveries in Nepal antedate all other Asian discoveries of a similar nature so far, it isn't difficult to conclude, too, that Nepal could well have been the first craddle of Man in Asia! □



Cadmendu's First Europeans



"AVTOMNE WINTER L'HIVER"

It is hard to believe that the words above-quoted, not commonly comprehensible even in the 21st century Nepal, should have formed part of a 330-year-old Kathmandu stone inscription. Yet, the fact is, they do!

Needless to add, the first and the third of these words, possibly French means 'autumn' and 'winter', while the middle one is perhaps English.

This blackstone tablet, embeded into a wall next to the Hanumandhoka palace and attributed to king Pratap Malla, is unique in Nepal in another respect too. For, besides the three words quoted above, it contains words from 13 other languages in addition to Nepali, many of them unfamiliar even in today's Nepal!

The element of surprise is further heightened by the fact that not a single European soul seems to have been in Nepal till 1761-2 but the aforesaid inscription dates back to 1635, at least 106 years earlier! If so, how on earth could king Pratap Malla possibly have familiarised himself with English and French words so as to have them correctly inserted into his inscription?

One of the earliest European visitors to Nepal, as far as it can be easily ascertained, was father Horatius Della Penha, a Capuchin missionary, who had been allowed to establish a hospice in Kathmandu in 1714. Emmanuel Frere, another European, arrived in Nepal two years later and was followed by Fr.

Dessidery, who had stopped at Kathmandu *enroute* from Tibet to Nepal. Fathers Grueber and D'Orville followed suit in the early 1760's.

But even considering that the trickle that had started with Della Penha in 1714 turned into a 'minitide' by 1742—when the number of Capuchins in Kathmandu valley totalled 59 and was expected to rise further following king Ranjit Malla's personal letter to the Pope at Vatican dated May 2, 1742, it still does not explain the seeming enigma of the English and French words that had 'infiltrated' into king Pratap Malla's inscription at Hanumandhoka.

It is in this context that I find it worthwhile quoting, in some detail, from a work, *Hamro Garima,* by Mr. Swayambhulal Shrestha. But, before doing that, I feel like making a passing reference to a cryptic two-line entry in my own earlier publication, *"Nepal A To Z"*, that reads: "Krebal (was) the first (European) to visit Nepal on his way back from Tibet (ca. 1628)".

Now, then, a rough gist of some passages from Mr. Shrestha's publication above-named. It reads at one place:

"On the 13th April 1626, a group of missionaries were sent from Cochin, capital of the Malabar Province (in India), to Tibet. One of them was Joab Kyabarel (*sic*). They had entered into Tibet's Utsaang area *via* north-western Bhutan... Joab arrived at Shighatse in January 1628, roughly 20 months after they had left Cochin. As their earlier experience, while passing through Bhutan, hadn't been an entirely happy one, they felt inclined to explore some alternative routes back home...

"Towards the end of January Kyabarel left Tibet. He was carrying with him a letter from a local ruler addressed to the king of Kathmandu, Lakhsmi Narasimha Malla.

"(It appears thus) that he had arrived at Kathmandu some 30 years prior to Grueber and D'Orville. As such, it can be said with certainty that Kyabarel was the first European to enter into Nepal. And it must be he, and those that followed him, who taught kings Lakshmi Narasimha and Pratap Malla the ABCs of the English and French scripts.

"Kyabarel was born in Portugal in 1599 A.D...and he died in Goa on the 4th July, 1660."

Hoping that the above excerpt establishes how the words AVTOMNE, WINTER and L'HIVER found their way into the Hanuman Dhoka inscription, we may now briefly dwell on certain other European pioneers who visited Nepal in the subsequent decades.

Fr. Dessideri's account of the life and times of King Mahindra Singh or Bhaskar Malla is contained in a separate chapter entitled *The Account Of*

Tibet, edited by Phillippo de Phillippe. It reads in part: "While I was in Tibet I returned *via* Nepal. The ruling king there has annexed many surrounding principalities (in the recent past). As the king of Patan died without any heir, all those areas were (also) inherited by him in the shape of paternal property."

A letter purported to have been written to the then Nepalese ruler by the Viceroy of Goa in February 1667 reads somewhat along the following lines:

"Your liberalism and greatness have been so well-renowned that I felt myself inclined to seek your hands in friendship and cordial relations. Not only that I have also been instructed by the emperor of Portugal who is a great and powerful ruler...I was given to understand that the missionaries, the bearers of this letter, were proceeding towards your court to stay in your kingdom... Any kindness and hospitality extended to them will be considered by me as a personel (sic) favour...."

This communication implies two things: first, that the Portugese missionaries were already on their way to *Cadmendu*, as they called it, and were not completely unfamiliar with its situation, terrain and people. Second, that they seem to have already been 'invited' to Nepal. The second conjecture is further stregthened by another reference to Nepal made by Grueber and D'Orville on their way back from China and Tibet to Europe *via* Kathmandu, that says: "We were very warmly received by the King of Cadmendu".

As the king referred to in Grueber's writing couldn't have been any other than Pratap Malla, concludes Mr. Shrestha, it is not completely inconceivable that whatever earlier acquaintance he may have had with Europeans like Krebal had made king Pratap Malla favourably disposed towards the Europeans in general and the Portugese missionaries in particular. No wonder this association also helped him familiarise himself with quite a bit of the English and French languages, as is evidenced in his Hanuman Dhoka inscription.*

TRN January 11, 1985

***A rejoinder from Father John J. Dahlheimer, SJ, of St. Xavier's School, Jawalakhel, reads:**

"In as much as Nagendra's "Cadmendu's First Europeans," appearing in the 11 January 1985 issue of *The Rising Nepal* deals with the history of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits, SJ), these comments are relevant.

"Father John Cabral, SJ, a Portuguese priest of the Malabar Province of the Society of Jesus, was indeed the first non-Asian, European if you will, to enter the territory which was to become the present Kingdom of Nepal and the city of Kathmandu in early 1628. He was coming from Shigatse, Tibet, *via* the Kuti-Nylam Pass, returning to his base in Houghli in the Great Delta.

"Arriving Christmas Eve 1661, Fr. John Grueber, SJ, an Austrian from Linz, of the Manchu Imperial Observatory, and Fr. Albert d'Orvelle, SJ, scion of a noble Belgian family, making the overland transit from Peking to Agra, *via* Lhasa, spent a short time in the capital city of the Kingdom of Kathmandu. King Pratap Malla did in fact invite the Jesuits to work in the Valley then, but they had to wait something short of three centuries before really implementing that first invitation.

"Pushing the estimated date of blackstone tablet attributed to this King up a quarter century or so to the time of this visit, the mystery begins to dissolve like the Kathmandu ground fog in mid-morning. "Winter" in the inscription, while it could be English, is more probably German. In which case the finger does point rather steadly at the Austrian (German speaking) and Belgian (French speaking) Jesuit duo.

"In 1742 the Pope would have governed the Church from Rome itself and not from the Vatican which at that time was merely an across-the-Tiber section of the City and did not become and independent city-state until the Lateran Treaty of 1929.

"Turning to the Capuchins (the Order of Friars Minor, Capuchin), by and large and originally Italians of the Province of Piceno in the Marches of Ancona on the Adriatic coast, from 1704 to 1742 the total personnel roster of their Tibet-Nepalese mission never exceeded 49. The "minitide" was not even a microtide in 1742 or any other year.

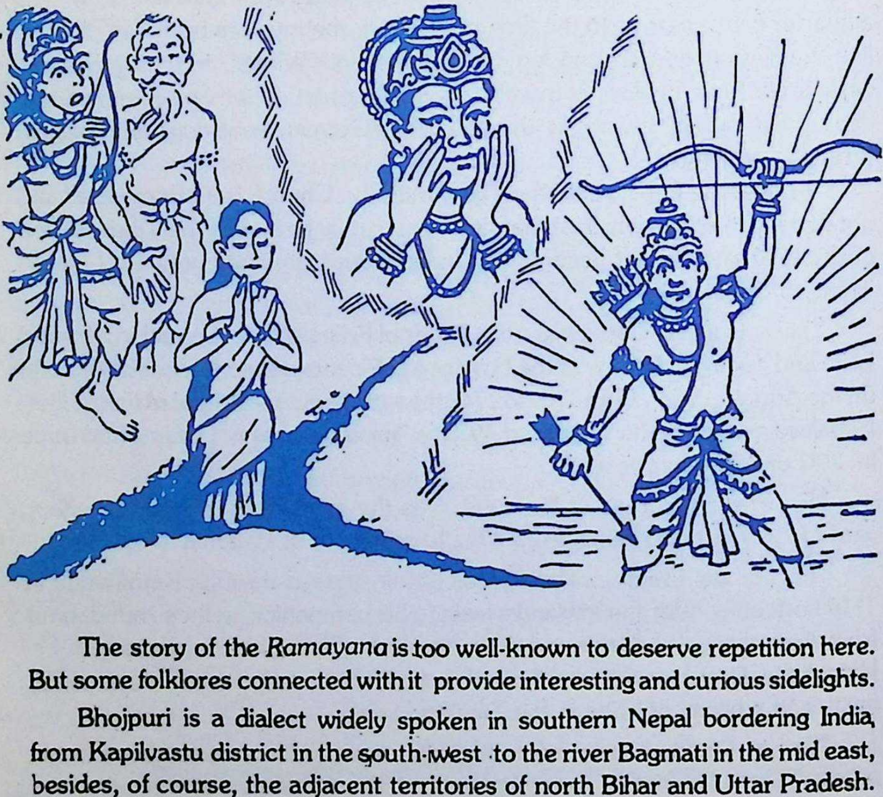
"Fr. Francis Horace of Pennabilli was the giant of the Capuchin effort, working in Tibet and Nepal from 1714 to his death at Patan in 1745.

"Fr. Manuel Freyre, a Portuguese Jesuit, passed through Kathmandu in 1716 hotfooting it for the lowlands, leaving his companion on their roundabout from Agra through Ladakh and down the Indus-Tsangpo valleys to Lhasa, Fr. Hippolytus Desideri, SJ, the "pistol" from Pistoia, Italy, happy as a pickle floating in a barrel of brine in the Tibetan capital.

"Father Desideri spent something like five very wonderful years in his private Shangri-la there, becoming one of the world's most versatile and memorable Tibetologists in the process. He, too, returning to base passed through the valley of Nepal *via* the Kuti-Nylam route in late 1721."

(Thanks Fr. Dahlheimer—Nagendra)

The Story of Rama: Bhojpuri Version



The story of the *Ramayana* is too well-known to deserve repetition here. But some folklores connected with it provide interesting and curious sidelights.

Bhojpuri is a dialect widely spoken in southern Nepal bordering India, from Kapilvastu district in the south-west to the river Bagmati in the mid east, besides, of course, the adjacent territories of north Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Unlike its sister dialects, Awadhi and Maithili, it does not boast of a literature worth the name, but the Bhojpuri treasure-house of folkore is both rich and varied. We will limit ourselves here to some portions of the Rama story gleaned from these folklores.

The story of Sita—that she had been found by king Janaka while he was ploughing a field—isn't the whole truth, if we are to go by the Bhojpuri version. For it says that she was found in a wooden basket that came floating down a river. One day, king Janaka, in the course of his daily visit to the river for his ablutions, saw the floating basket and had his boatmen pull it ashore. When they opened it, to their utter surprise they saw a beautiful new baby-girl inside. King Janaka immediately decided to adopt her and gave her the name. Sita

Also, the usual story is that Kaikeyi, Rama's step-mother, had helped king Dasaratha in the field of battle and in return obtained the king's promise to grant her two wishes. When it was time for Rama's coronation, Kaikeyi came up to king Dasaratha and asked him to fulfil his promise. Her first demand was that Rama be banished to the forest and, the second, that her own son, Bharata, be crowned instead. King Dasaratha had no option but tc yield to her wishes.

No, says the Bhojpuri version. In fact, according to it, the tussle between Kaushlaya, Rama's mother, and Kaikeyi had started the very day Rama was born. It says that Kaikeyi went to see the new-born babe, but was denied access to him. Infuriated at this insult, Kaikeyi swore that she would have Rama banished to the forest as soon as he attained twelve years of age.

King Dasaratha was disconsolate at this quarrel between his two wives and consulted his court *pandit* and astrologers as to how he could prevent Rama's banishment. But the astrologers were helpless against what the stars had in store for Rama: he was foredoomed to a life of exile, they told him!

The Ramayana story goes that Ravana assumed the form of a golden deer to divert Rama's attention, and when the latter went in a chase after the deer, Sita, left alone in the hut, was abducted by Ravana. But this episode is put differently in the "Bhojpuri version". It says, instead, that it was Rama's brother, Lakshmana, who ran after the deer and killed it.

Ravana was defeated in the battle and Rama rescued Sita. On their arrival back home, Rama decided that Sita should undergo the "fire trial" in order to prove her fidelity. But it was not merely a fire-trial, says the Bhojpuri folklore, and lists four different trials that Sita was required to undergo. No sooner, for instance, did she hold a glowing ember in her hands, than it died down. Next she was asked to hold a "Tulsi" (Basil) plant in her hands, but it also immediately wilted. And so on...

But the real reason why Rama abandoned his wife, Sita, was not limited to these tests, the Bhojpuri stories tell us. They go further and mention that Sita was somehow enamoured with Ravana and, in her private moments, used to draw his protraits! One day, Rama's younger sister (who, curiously enough, does not figure anywhere in most *Ramayana* texts), caught Sita in the act and reported the matter to Rama. An infuriated Rama immediately decided to banish Sita!

Curiously enough, the stories also say that Sita used to draw such portraits of Ravana out of sheer jealousy against her co-wives! That Rama had more than one wife is thus indicated and is yet another revelation not mentioned in almost all versions of the *Ramayana* epic!

Sita, in the course of her banishment, gives birth to Lava and Kusha. As soon as Rama hears of this, he proceeds to the forest where his wife was then living. He visits the place thrice at different intervals, so relate the Bhojpuri stories, but on all these three occasions Sita refuses even to see his face! He then sends a number of messengers to bring her back, but Sita refuses to oblige any of them, saying. "It is impossible for me to return. Why did Rama banish me in the first place? Let the gods never again unify us".

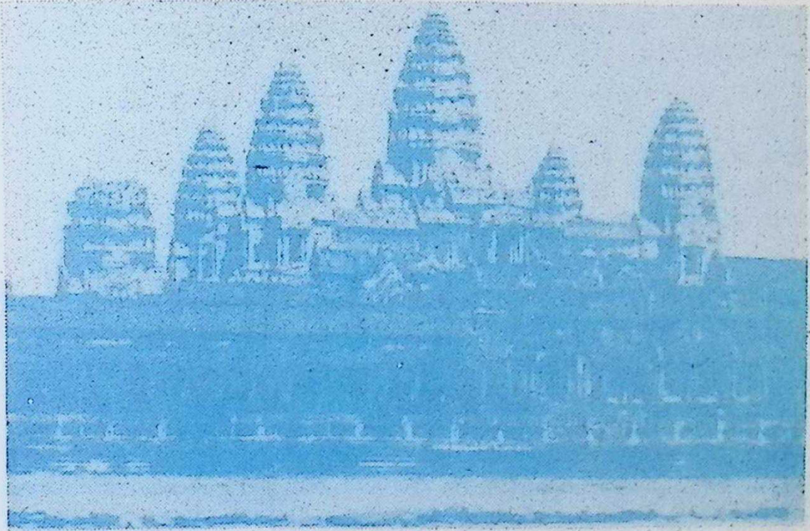
Sita, thus, is presented not only as a woman of self-respect and dignity, but also of a vengeful nature. The stories also seek to protrav her as being innocent and as one who was wrongly punished. What's more, she detested Rama so much that she didn't even reveal to her sons that Rama was their father! In fact, the stories have it that once, when Rama did come across his sons and asked them who their mother and father were, the young kids replied, "Sita is our mother, and Dasaratha our grandfahter. But who our father is, we do not know"!

Lastly, the usual *Ramayana* story that sage Vasistha ultimately succeeded in persuading Sita to visit Ayodhya at a time when Rama was holding an *Ashwamedha* sacrifice is also sought to be contradicted. The Bhojpuri stories put it that Sita could not disobey her preceptor, Vasistha, but did not visit Ayodhya either. She simply proceeded five steps in the direction of Ayodhya, and then returned to her hut! Such a self-respecting woman Sita was, if we are to go by these versions.

In other words, the Rama story of the Bhojpuri folkore not only differs from the more popular versions in many respects, but also abomerges as a remarkable human drama that ends in a tragedy. Rama wails and weeps, threatens to destroy and weeps, threantens to destroy the entire earth, but is unable to save Sita from sinking into the womb of the earth...

TRN August 16, 1983

From Bagmati To Borubodur?



Perhaps quite a few readers of this piece have come across claims, occasionally made, that a king of Nepal, in the middle of the seventh century, had invited Chinese builders to visit Kathmandu. And, to these builders, it is said, the credit goes for the conception of a style of architecture now well-known the world over as the "Pagoda" style.

On the other hand, the story of Arniko, particularly popular in Nepal, goes totally counter to the above acount. And, while it is a bit outlandish for a Nepali to bear a name like Arniko or Aruibo, we have little reason to doubt the veracity of his " artistic" mission to Tibet and China, as it is culled, in most part, from the Chinese records themselves.

Leaving aside the story of Arniko, which, in any case, dates no earlier than the 13th century, we have other sources that go to support the Nepalese claim of having "invented" the pagoda style of architecture. The most interesting and perhaps the earliest such record is to be found in the account of a Chinese travel book dating back to the days of the Tang dynasty. The book cannot, says Percival Landon, "be later than the earliest years of the tenth century AD, and is almost certainly earlier than the middle of the eighth". This narrative, he adds, is probably based upon the records left by Wang Huien Tse about the year 657 AD.

In subsequent periods too, we come across more than one Chinese traveller who were awed by such Nepalese palaces "of many roofs", a point which must have been made simply in order to emphasise the absence, in China, of the "pagodas", at least till then. "It cannot even be said that China improved upon the Nepalese model,", writes Landon, and the following account from his well known book, "Nepal" (1882), is worth quoting:

"As I write I look down upon the yellow roofs of the Forbidden City of Peking. In number and size these naturally eclipse the similar structures of Nepal. But magnificent as they are, they offer no instance of more than a triple roof, and in all that historic expanse there is nothing which can for a moment compare in beauty and richness with Changu Narayan or with the royal square of Patan".

This much for China. Now to turn to Sri Lanka and India. General L. de Beylie, recalling the parallels offered by the Boonze Monastery of a Thousand Cells, which, in the second century AD., was ornamented with precious stones by King Dutthagamani at Anuradhapura (near Colombo), finds that the influence of Nepalese structure and ornament can be traced far beyond the limits of the country. He discovers them in another eleventh century work—in the great Ananda Monastery at Pajan, and he also considers that the concentric circles of the "hit" in Burma and Assam also are taken from Nepal as well as the square entablature at the top of the dome *(toran)*.

Monsieur Francois Benoit, writing about medieval and modern oriental architecture in 1912, also finds the influence of Nepal in Burma, in China, and possibly even in India.

To quote Landon again: "Apart from the temples, the viharas or monastic settlements exhibit a style which is also peculiar to Nepal. In the centre of a square courtyard, two storeys in height, there will generally be found a closely slatted cage containing an image. This structure is presumably intended solely to protect the figure from defilement, like the stone lattice-work that shelters each of the upper images at Borubodur!"

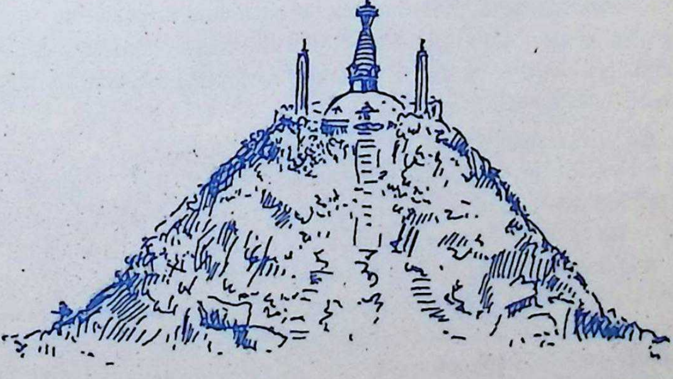
The mere menton of the world-famous Borubodur in an essay on Nepalese art and architecture is significant in our context. And it may be added that there are at least two conceptual characteristics in the Borubodur stupas that somehow are reminiscent of the Nepalese architectural tradition. The first is the recognition of the value of an entire hill as plinth, of the Swayambhunath variety. And the second, the stone lattice-work "that shelters each of the upper images at Borubodur" (as Landon puts it) is so much akin "to the closely slatted cages containing Nepalese images". And, thirdly, the fact that the "Chandi Kalasan", the first of the Borubodur stupas built in AD 778, "is dedicated to the Buddhist goddess, Tara", as mentioned by Ann Kumar in the book "The Civilisation of Monsoon Asia". Doesn't the very name "Tara" ring a familiar bell in our ears, dear readers?

To add, the Borubodur temple-complex in central Java was built in honour of Mahayana Buddhism (around 750-850 A.D), according to Encyclopedia Britannica. That is, around the same time that the first Chinese travel book, mentioned earlier, so much extols Nepalese architecture. "And in these 100 years", adds Encyclopedia Americana, "it is reasonable to imagine that many artists and architects from Buddhist countries may have been imported or invited". Could these "Buddhist countries" have included Nepal, to many the home of Buddhism of both the Mahayana and Vajrayana variety, even today?

That also brings us to the point if Gunadharma was one of such persons so "imported or invited"? This is the crux of the question and, in a sense, the basis of our story. For, a noted researcher in Nepalese history and culture, Swayambhulal Shrestha, strongly holds, in the course of an article in "Situ", a Newari literary periodical, that Gunadharma was possibly the man behind the construction of Borubodur and that he hailed from Nepal! This not only goes contrary to the more general assertion that to Gunavarman, from India goes such credit; it also adds an entirely new dimension to the whole Borubodur story.

What's the truth? Time alone, we hope, will tell!

TRN August 9, 1983



Caves on the Cliffs

The 'mysterious' cave cities that line the upper reaches of the Kali Gandaki in the Mustang region have posed a challenge to archaeologists for some two or three decades now. Tony Hagen, who first brought these caves to the notice of the outside world. believed them to be the remnants of some ancient monasteries or mines. Later, in 1965, Michel Piessel reported counting twentynine such cave-sites, several of great size, and many carved into cliffs 100 metres above the valley floor.

Who built these caves and why? Were they, as Hagen put it, remnants of ancient monasteries, or, as Piessel puts it, cave "cities". If so, who were the people who lived there? And, lastly, why are they located so high in the cliffs and above the valley floor, where few humans can hope to reach today?

These and some other questions pestered me too, as I stood, aghast and agape, below one of these 'cave dwellings' beyond Tukucha sometime ago. But the layman, a mere curious visitor, that I was, there was little I could do to unravel the mystery, except ask some local 'know-all' about them. Outcome:

nil!

Back in Kathmandu, I consulted some experts whose business it is to delve into ancient history. If any records did exist, they could be in the Tibetan language, said one. No such records, even in Tibetan, have come to light, opined another.

But, at least one question was seemingly solved. Asked why these caves, if at all they had been dwellings in the ancient past, were located that high? How could the so-called "dwellers" have had physical access to them at all? Or did they have wings of some sort to fly up to them?

"Nothing of the kind," replied Director of HMG's Sharma archaeology Department. "All of those caves must naturally have been at the ground level at different periods of history. But, over countless centuries, the rains and the rivers drained the area deeper and ever deeper, lowering the valley floors in the process. And, as a corollary, the caves rose higher and higher, till they were out of reach of us humans in the present times", he said.

He agreed that a scientific investigation of some of the Mustang caves might lead to some significant discoveries about the ancient, if not the prehistoric, populations of the regions. He mentioned, too, that cave-settlements were not a speciality of the Mustang area alone, but they were spread in many other countries like Afghanistan, China and even as far west as America. Why, he added, the discovery of similar ancient caves in north China towards the turn of this century had revealed a vast wealth of paintings, manuscripts and other artifacts dating back to the beginning of the Christian era. And, how about the world-famous and prehistoric Altamira caves in Spain, he asked.

It is interesting to see what Piessel has to say about these caves in one of his books, "The Great Himalayan Passage" (Collins, London, 1974, pp. 247): "The transformation of some of these cave dwellings into cells for monks is the origin of the belief that these cliff-cities might originally have been nothing more than ancient convents.This theory seems improbable. In the first place, there are far more caye sites, some with over 200 rooms, than there could ever have been monks and monasteries in the upper Kali Gandaki area. Secondly, the biographies of great monks who came to preach in Mustang and along the upper Kali Gandaki in the fourteenth and fifteenth centures give us a clear account of how many monasteries there were in the area, most of which still exist. Their lists do not take into account the 30-odd great cave settlements, even though five monasteries are settled at the foot or indeed inside some of the caves. Lastly, the transformations these caves.underwent whenever monks settled in them seems to indicate that the monks were re-employing an existing locale for a different purpose, rather than the original one for which these cliff cities had been laboriously carved from the cliffs.

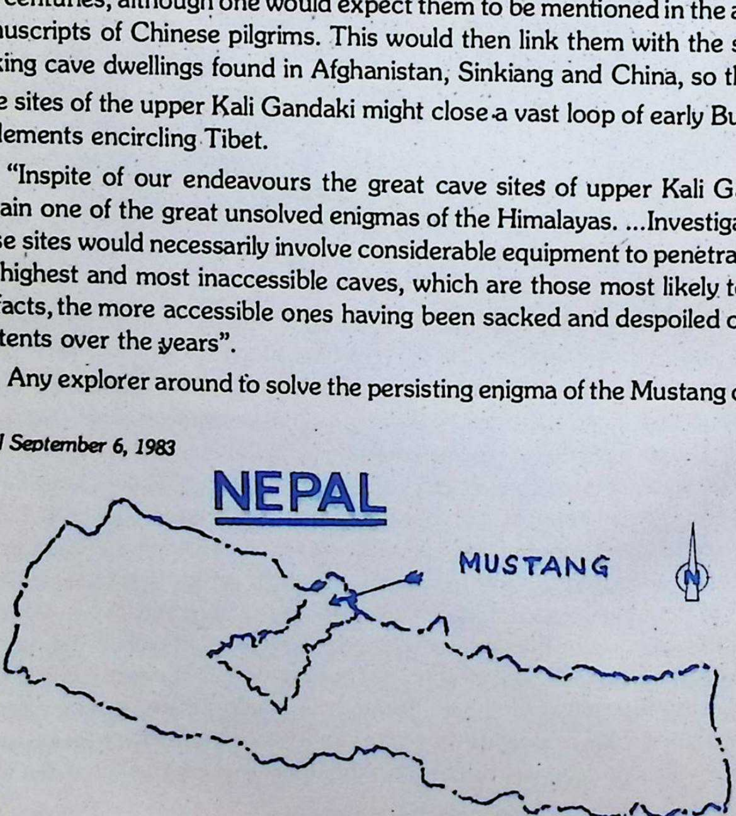
..."We were obliged to limit our investigations to the lesser caves near Tukucha and two others located farther south near Larjung. Those caves we examined continued to reveal no clues of their origin, although we were able to note the unusual Maya-type arches in the passage ways that led from one cave to another. Each room was linked to the others by interior corridors, as in those far more spectacular cliff dwellings I had seen north of Tukucha. The individual rooms were spread out in horizontal rows with upto ten different levels or storeys, yet some of those I had recorded had their lowest level some two to three hundred feet above the valley floors.

..."There are indications that originally the inhabitants of central Asia frequently lived in caves when not digging their homes out of the flat, open plains. It is also possible that these caves had a religious use as shelters for pilgrims, not of the Lamaist church but of the early Buddists of the fourth and fifth centuries, although one would expect them to be mentioned in the ancient manuscripts of Chinese pilgrims. This would then link them with the similar-looking cave dwellings found in Afghanistan, Sinkiang and China, so that the cave sites of the upper Kali Gandaki might close a vast loop of early Buddhist settlements encircling Tibet.

"Inspite of our endeavours the great cave sites of upper Kali Gandaki remain one of the great unsolved enigmas of the Himalayas. ...Investigation of these sites would necessarily involve considerable equipment to penetrate into the highest and most inaccessible caves, which are those most likely to yield artifacts, the more accessible ones having been sacked and despoiled of their contents over the years".

Any explorer around to solve the persisting enigma of the Mustang caves?

TRN September 6, 1983



In Defence
Of
Swami Maharaj

Nepal is now in the early 'forties of the twenty-first century B.S. (The term 'twentieth', as applied to the present century, is thus a misnomer the Nepalese context. Besides, we have left behind us more than three decades of democratic experiments and exercise. Out-dated social institutions like the caste-system have, at least legally, been cast off with the advent of the Legal Code (Mulki Ain)-amendment some twenty years ago. Yet, even today, the majority of the post-1950 generation of Nepalese hasn't been able to shake off the hang-over of a caste-ridden past.

Imagine, then, the unflinching and exemplary courage of a young man, a reigning Hindu monarch at that, who had the guts to break the barriers and bondage of caste by publicly marrying a brahmin girl some two centuries ago from now (in early 1790s, to be exact)! And, what's more, he even had the scruples to sacrifice his throne in favour of the offspring born out of such a love-union. This admirably revolutionary effort on his part should have egged subsequent Nepalese generations on to even more laudable efforts. But, to an unappreciative posterity, he has come down as one of the most misunderstood men in history. And, we, instead of elevating him to the pedestal of a rightful fame as the first revolutionary who sought to demolish casteism in

Nepalese society, have, after the fashion of a few prejudiced British-Indian chroniclers, who had their own axe to grind in tarnishing the Nepalese king's image, simply revell in taunting and denigrating him. He has, in short, erred less than has been erred against.

Not only was king Rana Bahadur Shah (otherwise also known as '*Swami Maharaj*') a great social revolutionary. Had it not been for the fierce battle of wits he waged against the British East India Company (which had already securely lodged itself in capital Kathmandu on the strength of the treaty of B.S. 1858 or 1801 AD), and ultimately succeeded in packing it off, bag and baggage, out of this country, we wouldn't perhaps have been here today waxing eloquent on our nationalism, tradition of political independence, unimpaired sovereignty and what have you!

Now, to list a few of the historical blasphemies levelled against him by many, but which have been proved baseless and prejudiced in the light of recent researches on king Rana Bahadur Shah.

Francis Hamilton a contemporary historian who had been to Kathmandu along with Captain Knox, the first British Resident, says, for instance, that the Swami Maharaj, on his return from self-exile in Benares (India), had made himself the Regent. And, many subsequent chroniclers like Hunter, Oldfield, Balchandra Sharma, Surya Bikram Gewali, K. P. Srivastava and even the redoubtable Baburam Acharya apparently blindly copied Hamilton. Yet, if the truth is to be told, a royal edict issued by king Girvan Yuddha Bikram Shah in B.S. 1862 (1805 A.D.) conclusively proves that the Swami Maharaj had been appointed a *Mukhtiyar* (Prime Minister) and not a regent.

It can also be mentioned, on the strength of the said edict, that, quite contrary to examples of prime ministers stepping ultimately into the shoes of their kings (history is full of them), here we find a unique instance where a king not only volunteered to step down from his throne but also gladly assumed the role of a prime minsiter when a national contingency demanded it of him. A nobler sense of sacrifice on the one hand and of shouldering responsibility on the other is rare to come by. For, it was during his brief stint as a Mukhtiyar (hardly two months?) that he swiftly and cleverly snapped relations between Nepal and the British East India Company—thereby shattering the latter's dreams of establishing an imperialistic hegemony over Nepal. If this does not establish him as a great nationalist, I wonder what else will!

Another glaring distortion of facts is seen in respect of the expenses Swami Maharaj incurred during his self-exile in Benares. Here again, most historians including Oldfield, Aitchison, Sharma and Acharya are almost one in giving credit to the British Indian authorities for meeting the expenses of his stay there. But a letter written by his wife, queen Rajeshwari Devi, on her return from Benares, and a promissory note written by king 'Rana Bahadur Shah in B.S. 1860 (AD 1803) against a loan of Rs. 60,001 taken by him from a businessman, Dwarikadass, conclusively prove that the royal entourage did not depend on British doles to see it through the self-exile days.

Also, the long and almost endearing letter queen Rajeshwari Devi dutifully wrote to the Swami Maharaj in Benares soon after her arrival at Kathmandu (for a copy of this letter as also that of the promissory note referred to above, readers are advised to refer to Chittaranjan Nepali's well-researched book, "Rana Bahadur Shah")gives a lie, once again, to historians like Landon, Hunter, Northy and Gewali who have roundly alleged that her husband's "misdeeds", like philandering in Benares, were primarily responsible for her ultimate and lonely return to Kathmandu. On the other hand, it was the outcome of a grand and statesmanlike strategy, jointly wrought out by the Swami and his consort, that threw off the British yoke.

Such falsehoods fabricated to paint the noble king in adverse light are galore, but is is beyond the scope of a brief write-up, like this one, to delve into greater details. But three other significant events relating to the period and used by many uncharitable chroniclers to cast aspersions on the king's august personality may briefly be noted here in passing.

First, it was the famous episode known as *Baasatthi Haran* (Confiscation of B.S. 1962). It is true that king Rana Bahadur Shah did confiscate the *birta*-lands belonging to Brahmins and the *guthi*-lands dedicated to temples that year. But is wasn't the act of "a demented king bent upon avenging the death of queen Kantimati", as Bal Chandra Sharma puts it. The very fact that seven long years intervened between the death of Kantimati (B.S. 1856) and this confiscation is enough to counter Sharma's assertion. On the other hand, it seems the confiscation was justified by the needs of statecraft; pressed with lack of resources required to prepare his country to wage a war of defence against the British, an eventuality not altogether unforeseen in the wake of the unceremonious—and almost forcible -- closure of the British Residency and a virtual deportation of Captain Knox, what other alternative was left for the Swami Maharaj?

Second, Swami Nirbanananda (not Nirgunananda as some have put it) has been accused of destroying many idols and images of deities, including that of goddess Haratimai, following the death of Kantimati. While the death of his beloved wife may have driven a grief-stricken king to embark upon such a "spree", Mr. Chittaranjan Nepali ascribes this aspect of his seemingly iconocastic and erratic behaviour to an entirely different factor. It was possibly the consequence of his conversion into the *Josmani* cult—a Hindu sect opposed to idol-worship, he rightly suggests.

Third, it is said that he was most unpopular among his subjects as he had banished most children from the capital in the wake of the small-pox epidemic that had brought about his beloved Kantimati's premature death. This seemingly irrational act of his can also perhaps be justified on two grounds--one, that in the absence of any other way of immunising the capital's children from this scourge, banishing them temporarily along with their parents, despite the immense suffering it brought about to all concerned, was probably the only way out; and, two, that a small-pox death had been forecast by an irate *punditry* as being in store for his very young (three-years old) son, Girbaan Yuddha Vikram Shah, who had also been made the king, and since a similar forecast in respect of the queen had proved to be only too true earlier Rana Bahadur Shah could have acted the way he did in order to protect his only progeny

On my part, I would also add that he was after all a human being, prone to lapses as we all are. But this seemingly harsh step of his shouldn't impair our objectivity in respect of the prevailing reality or his other good qualities

What we must not ignore also, is the remarkable fact that, despite the blasphemy spread against him by the *Birta*dispossessed Brahmins on the one hand and the deported Britishers on the other, the army and the majority of the people remained singularly and steadfastly loyal to the Swami Maharaj till the very end. The very soldiers led by Damodar Pandey to arrest the Swami on his return from Benares not only laid arms the moment they saw their beloved king, but also turned around to give a chase to Pandey himself till he was killed at Bhadrakali. What other evidence is needed to prove the popular love and loyalty that Swami Maharaj commanded at the hands of his people, even after a long self-exile? That this great leader of men succumbed to court treachery some two months later goes only to add yet another halo to his royal mantle--that of a martyr to the cause of Nepal's freedom and sovereignty, the two ideals that were so dear to him till the very end of his short, 31-year long, career.□

Jung:
The Lesser-Known Side

Kudos to *Ka. Dee* (Kamal Dixit), the well-known literary researcher, for coming out with yet one more jewel of a publication, listed as No. 63 in the Jagadamba publications series. Titled "Janga-Geeta", probably in keeping with the spirit of some earlier titles like *"Rama-Geeta"* and others, this well-researched yet tiny publication isn't, however, all eulogy of premier Jung Bahadur, as the term "Geeta" (meaning 'Song') might normally suggest.

Well, this is not purported to be a critique or a review of this highly illuminating publication. What is sought here is to share, with my readers, a couple of interesting insights on Jung Bahadur thrown by Mr. Dixit in his usual inimitable style. What's more, as each single anecdote, each single comment, bearing on the personality of the enigmatic historical hero comes right from primary and contemporary sources like his wives, 'courtiers', priests and the like, their authenticity can nowhere be in doubt. What, however, adds the right 'spice' to these stories is *Ka. Dee's* brilliant editorial notes without which much of the meanings and subtle nuances would have been lost, particularly to a lay reader like me. And I entirely agree with the erudite editor when he has something to this effect to say: "The many new facets of Jung Bahadur's life, the changing nuances presented by every successive account, lead us to presume that both the pictures of Jung, whether drawn by the English historians or by their Nepalese counterparts, aren't perhaps as authentic as we thought they were."

Particularly interesting are the accounts attributed to *purohit* Shivaraj, Jinarani, Babarjung's wife, an army officer Khadga Singh Gurung, and Rama Bhakta. Of these, Jinarani was one of Jung Bahadur's "numerous" wives, while Mir Subba Ram Bhakta could have been "an old and faithful court official", according to Mr Dixit. As for Khadga Singh, it is said that the second edition of Ambika Prasad Upadhyay's "History of Nepal" has made a pointed reference to a namesake Gurung officer in these words: "There was an old man aged 86 years, in Kathmandu. He had been Jung Bahadur's security guard for a long time. His name was Major Khadga Singh Gurung." Upadhyaya, the author, was a lawyer from Patna (India) who had visited Kathmandu once or twice as a guest of premier Chandra Shumshere. Consequently, the second edition of his above-referred book is stated to bear a greater stamp of authenticity in view of some "hitherto secret and unknown" information provided by the author's contact with erudite scholars like Pandit Kashinath and Mir Subba Ram Mani, adds Mr. Dixit.

Khadga Singh, likewise, was one of such invaluable sources and he has been quoted at one place as commenting that Jung Bahadur's major 'weaknesses' included "elephants, gambling, acrobatic bouts, and sex". Singh is also said to add that in his later life, Jung had shown increasing addiction to opium and his daily intake would rise to as many as 18 'tablets'. These intimate insights into Jung Bahadur's character had never been made public by anybody in the past and it is for this reason that posterity owes its debt of gratitude to persons like Khadga Singh, as quoted by Upadhyaya.

Jinarani is said to have been the daughter of a Budhathoki hailing from Baglung. *Purohit* Shivaraj, in his turn, was a priest belonging to the Satyal clan and was instrumental also in making many a valuable information available to, among others, Percival Landon, the noted British historian. Shivaraj, for instance, alludes to Jung Bahadur's "fits of blind fury", in the course of which he would think of nothing to physically batter people to near death; but, once he had let off his steam thus, he was also quick to repent what he had done. One is led to suspect, adds Mr. Dixit, that such an increasingly intemperate behaviour of Jung could have been a direct sequel to his intake of opium in ever larger doses in later life. This aspect of his character is highlighted, for example, in an incident where he had once beaten up his wife, mother of Babarjung, black and blue, and driven her out of the house; but, on having realised his 'folly' later, Jung not only fetched her back home, but also sought to assuage her hurt feelings by way of a cash 'compensation' of Rs 2600—quite a hefty and tidy sum in those days!

But, lest this ancedote of a "hefty compensation" give one the impression that Jung was very generous with his purse, Khadga Singh is said to correct us by painting a rather unflattering picture of Jung's munificence otherwise. A touch of "stinginess" in Jung's character, suggests Mr. Dixit, seems only natural if we were to consider his rather none-too-rich an upbringing that had taught him the value of money rather too well. What's more, if any more evidence of Jung as a "money-saver" was needed, we have only to turn to his own wife, Jinarani, who is said to have gone on record saying that even his "earnings" from gambling were invested by him in purchasing some Terai lands for himself!

The fact that he used to invest his own savings in buying plots of land opens an entirely new vista in the character of Jung Bahadur, rightly asserts Dixit, and adds: "Well, had he only wanted it, he could easily have, in his capacity as a Prime Minister, appropriated to himself any number of *Birtaa* lands. The mere fact that he didn't choose to do so is enough to underline his sterling quality as a man—as far as honesty in matters of finance and state affairs is concerned."

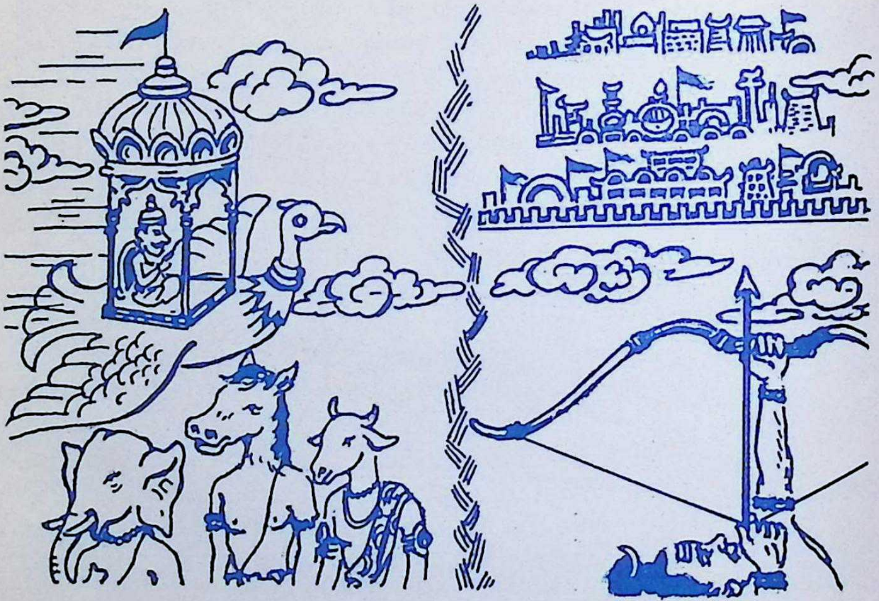
Some other interesting sidelights on Jung Bahadur the man rather than Jung Bahadur the premier are also worth noting, according to Mr. Dixit. For one thing, he wasn't a very devout person—religion, in other words, wasn't one of his *fortes*. For another, he was not very fond of reading and writing either. "Used to read once in a long white", his *wife* and dauther-in-law have been quoted as saying!

Another sidelight thrown by this illuminating "Geeta" on Jung is also no less interesting. It is revealed, for instance, that Jung didn't pin much faith on doctors on the one hand, and on the other, was quite adept in "reading the pulse" (*Ayurvedic*-style) himself: besides, he also knew quite a bit of the traditional *"jharphook"* system of curing diseases. What's more, he had also sought to revive the *Ayurvedic* system of medicine by bringing its practitioners together in a sort of meeting of minds on some occasions.

All these "revelations" on Jung are highly significant if only for their sheer novelty. It is thus we have reasons to be grateful to *Ka. Dee*—for, had it not been for his undying love for unravelling the past, posterity would perhaps have been deprived of such valuable pieces of historical and literary information.

T.R.N. February 8, 1985

Ancient Scientific Marvels!



Can we split up a single human hair into 100 equal strips? Of course not!

But, a recent advertisement in a popular English magazine reads: "Imagine splitting up a single hair. Into 100 equal parts... That is what it's like to work to an accuracy of 0.3 micron," etc.

Obviously a remarkable feat of scientific achievement this one, isn't it? Yet, if one were to beleive a claim made by a Nepali publication, *Prachin Hindu Vigyan* (Ancient Hindu Science), even this apparently remarkable modern scientific breakthrough is nothing new! Quoting a *Mantra* credited to a Vedic seer, Swetashwar (pp 83), the author, Dr. Swami Prapannacharya, holds that a single hair had already been split up into 100 equal parts, "some thousands of years ago", during the Vedic times!

This is just one of many such astounding ancient scientific achievements recorded by the author. He would, in fact, have us believe that modern scientific achievements pale into insignificance in comparison to similar breakthroughs made by our oriental forefathers. Here are, for example, some inventions so accredited to our Vedic forbears: noiseless time-piece, three-storeyed aeroplanes, submarines made of gold, solar-powered aircraft, head transplantation (surgery), wireless, radio and television, telescope and thermometer, phonograph and taperecorder, etc. In short, according to the Swami, there is nothing today that is new: everything was known to the ancient sages. You name it, and there you will find it in the ancient Vedas!

We have, of course, heard about the *Pushpak Viman* that initially belonged to Lord Kuvera, but, on his defeat, was flown by Ravana from the Kailash mountain to Lanka. Lord Rama, in his turn, vanquished Ravana and, along with Sita, flew back on board the same "aircraft" from Lanka to Ayodhya. According to Dr. B.P. Bartaka, as quoted in the book above-referred, Ravana was killed on Sunday, the 5th November, 7292 B.C. and the date of Rama's flight back home is said to be the 5th December, 7292 B.C. This leads the Swami to conclude that aeroplane was a familiar mode of transport as early as some 8,000 years go before the birth of Christ!

What's more, *Pushpak* was just one type of aircraft said to have been invented by our ancestors. Other flying equipment included the Tripura Viman, Bhraajishnu Viman, Suta Viman, Amshubaha, Suryakanta, Sauva Viman, Taramukh, Chandra Kanta and the like. One of them, the Tripura, it is even said, was not only one-storeyed—but a three-storeyed marvel, jointly "assembled" by sages like Jamadagni and Bharagava as seemingly referred to in the pages of the Rigveda itself!

The "aircraft" Tripura, another version puts it, was invented not by gods or sages, but by a *Rakshasa* (demon) named Tarakasur, who, it is said was a celebrated scientist in Vedic/Puranic times. Three of his sons, namely Taraksha, Kamalaksha and Vidyunmali, were said to have been equally well-known scientists, the last one probably even being the inventor of electricity itself—hence the nick-name Vidyunmali (*Vidyut* standing for electricity in Sanskrit). The word Tripura, it is also suggested, could have been the name of a 'Space City', that was supposedly destroyed by Shankara, said to be another scientist of distinction, in what was possibly a 'Star War'!

The pre-historic sage, Kardama, is believed to be another man to have 'piloted' his own aircraft known as the Bhrajisnu Viman. This aircraft, it is said, was so huge as to have accommodated a courtyard or a mini-park inside it! Another aircraft named Suva, and accredited to Maya, a Danava (demon) king, was said to have been borrowed by king Shalva in order to fly to Dwarika. That this particular flying machine was comparable to the present-day Hovercraft is implied in the 'fact' that it landed on the ocean; a *shloka* (verse) in the *Padma Purana* also *alludes* that the famous sage Brrigu had once flown to Mt. Kailasha in order to meet *Lord Shankara*, "by the air-route".

But this much about our mythical aircrafts or whatever they were!

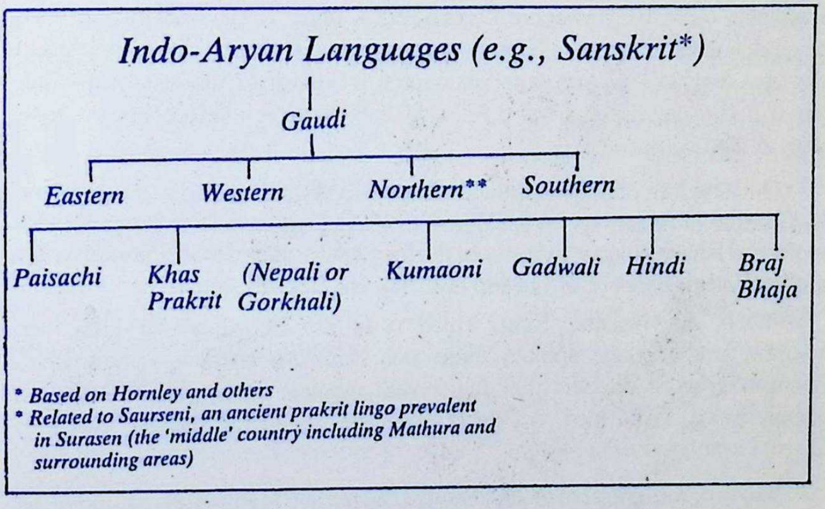
Now, to turn our attention to the amazing medical and surgical advancements said to have been attained by some other Vedic or Puranic seers. We 'moderns' have not ceased to wonder, to this day, at the remarkable stories of heart, kidney or eye-transplantations elsewhere; for instance, the report about Baby Fae who received a baboon's heart only the other day. But, Swami Prapannacharya does not obviously consider even such epoch-making feats of the 'Eighties as being anything new! According to him, much more amazing feats, namely "head-transplantation", were attained by the legendary Ashvini Kumars, the Rigvedic surgeons. The head of a horse, for instance, was successfully "transplanted" onto the trunk of sage Dadhyanga (also known as Atharva), who—wonder of wonders!—continued to speak and behave exactly like a human being even after this amazing "transplantation"! Other well-known instances of ancient head-transplantations are found in the stories of Lord Ganesha–whose head was cut off by an angry Lord Shiva, but was later replaced with that of an elephant—and of Daksha, who, in his turn, received the head of a he-goat after being decapitated by Birabhadra!

Replacement of human limbs was, of course, absolutely common, says the author. And, in the process, he recounts the Rigvedic story of, among others, a lady called Vishpala. Once she had broken her leg and the Ashvini Kumars came to her rescue by replacing the broken leg with one made of iron!

Well, it is beyond the scope of this short write-up to recount all the marvels—scientific or otherwise—found in the ancient texts. To conclude, I would only add that the message the erudite Swami seeks to drive home in the course of his lengthy exercise is simply this: the so-called modern education system has kept on feeding us with half-truths—if not utter "falsehoods"—by way of crediting all scientific achievements to present-day scientists in the West. If we only care to delve deeply, he adds, we will discover that the genesis of many modern-day scienfitic achievements is right there in the writings of our own ancient seers and sages!

TRN December 21, 1984

Nepali, Hindi and English



Indo-Aryan Languages (e.g., Sanskrit)*

** Based on Hornley and others*

** Related to Saurseni, an ancient prakrit lingo prevalent in Surasen (the 'middle' country including Mathura and surrounding areas)*

To say that the Nepali and Hindi languages have enjoyed sisterly relations for a long time in the past is to repeat an age–worn cliche. Nepal's close geographical proximity with the Hindi–speaking north-Indian States, added to the fact that a large section of our Terai population speaks dialects such as Maithili, Bhojpuri and Awadhi, besides Hindi proper, explains this Nepali-Hindi affinity. What's more, the Nepali and Hindi languages trace their origin to a common parent–stock, namely the Indo-European family of languages and the Vedic Sanskrit. But that is not to say that Nepali is a derivative of Hindi, as some people hold, and it is pertinent to examine, in this context, where exactly these two more or less similar tongues feature in the aforesaid family of languages, and how this affinity came about.

In earlier days, Nepali language was also known as Khas or Parbatiya (Eastern Pahari). The Khasas were a people probably of Scythian origin that hailed from areas around the Caspean Sea. Later, they are said to have migrated to Khasgar (meaning, perhaps, the Home of the Khasas), Khasmir or Kashmir and then to the erstwhile Sinja area in Western Nepal. Some people like the late Mahananda Sapkota even hold that the Khas language was not in fact a branch of the Indo-Europan family of languages, but a tongue of an earlier origin. This assumption, however, has not been proved, let alone widely accepted.

Besides Hindi, the modern Nepali language is closely linked also with Bengali, Maithili, Bhojpuri and Awadhi, as well as Kumaoni, Garhwali and Gujarati. The Kumaon and Garhwal areas, besides being considered a stronghold of the Khasa people, had also come under the sway of the Gorkhas for quite a while. Professor Guiseppe Tucci holds that the Khasa people ruled over an extensive kingdom with their capital as Sinja and Dullu around the 12th century. Capilla, Krachalla and Ashok Challa were the better- known 'first' kings of this dynasty.

The kingdom of Sinja was divided into two provinces, Jadan and Khasan. The people of Jadan spoke a Tibeto-Burman tongue, while those of Khasan spoke the Khasa language. Some of the inscriptions found in the Sinja area are said to feature Sanskrit at the top and Nepali at the bottom.

When the Nagaraj Kings ruled over the Sapaadlakṣha area, the predominant language spoken there was Nepali, according to Balkrishna Pokhrel. Thus, it appears that the Sinjali language developed into modern Nepali which, in its turn, admits of three classifications, namely, Western, Central and Eastern.

Sinjali or the Western group may also be termed Medieval Nepali as can be seen in the copper-plate inscription of one Dhawakarmatha (15th century). A linguist further classifies the Western group into *Orpachhima* (Near—Western), *Maajh Pacchma* (Mid-Western) and *Para Pachchima* (Far Western) According to this analysis, present day Nepal areas like Achham, Bajhang and Bajura would come into the first, Doti and Dandeldhura in the second and Baitadi in the third.

The central Nepali has also been classified into dialects such as Lamjunli, Asirdali, Tibrikoti, Humli, Raskoti and Dolpali. And the Eastern Nepali, in its turn, is said to include the Khasaan (Rapti and Bheri areas), Parbati (Dhaulagiri, Lumbini and Gandaki areas) and Gorkhali (east of Gorkha right upto Darjeeling and Assam areas of north eastern India). The existence of the Eastern dialect in the Kathmandu area is evidenced by the inscriptions of King Laxmi Narsingh Malla (1611 A.D.), Jagatprakash Malla (1673 A.D.) and Pratap Malla (1650 A.D.), that is, much before the unification of Nepal by king Prithvi Narayan Shah. These inscriptions, thus, give a lie to the widely-held conception that Nepali language entered into Kathmandu Valley only on the advent of the Gorkhas.

The language prevalent in areas around Gorkha that subsequently came to be known as the *Gorkha Bhasha*, features in the works of Sakti Ballav Arjyal, Suvananda, Haridas and some others. Following the unification of Nepal at the hands of king Prithvi Narayan Shah and the shifting of his capital from Gorkha to Kathmandu, this language also gradually came to be known as Nepali proper. Thus, the Khas language transformed itself into the Gorkha Bhasha and subsequently, into the Nepali language.

A cursory glance at the position of Nepali on the one hand and some European languages on the other will go to show the link persisting between English and Nepali as well. To begin with, the Nepali langauge is as much a branch of the Indo-European family of languages as eight other branches of this family, namely, Keltic, Germanic, Tutonic, Italic, Helenik, Tokharian, Hittite, Albanian and Balto-Slavic which are spoken in Europe and the rest two, namely, Armenian and Indo-Iranian, spoken in Asia. Six of these languages fall into the Kentum category and the last four in the Satum category, such as Nepali.

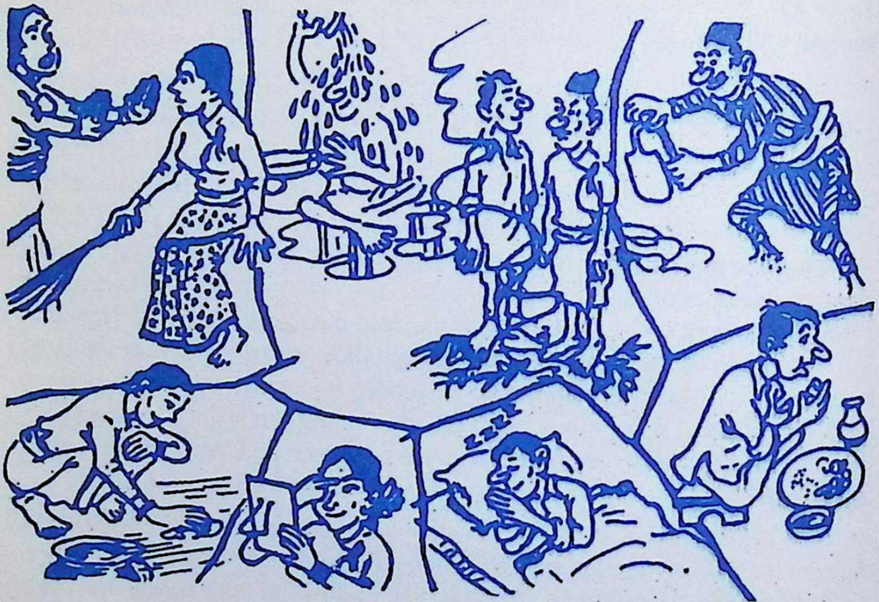
The Vedic Sanskrit language also traces its link to the Indo-Iranian family of languages. The Vedic literature may have been composed in north-western India around 1500 B.C., but by the time the Aryans had split themselves into three language-groups, namely: (1) Western or Iranian (2) Central or Durd (the language of the Sakas, Khasas, Pisachas, etc.) and (3) Eastern or Vedic.

The transformation of Vedic Sanskrit into Nepali is said to have taken place through the Prakrit tongues, such as Sauraseni, Magadhi. Paisachi, etc., though a school of thought would have us believe that Prakrit was not a successor, but a predecessor, of Sanskrit. Sauraseni Prakrit belonged to the Surasen era and it was from this Prakrit that the modern Hindi, Gujarati, Panjabi, Sindhi and Nepali were born. The Nepali-Hindi link is put into better perspective thus.

The Nepali language, in its earliest form, can be dated back to about six hundred years. As mentioned earlier, the inscriptions of kings Prithwi Malla (1356 A.D.),and Aditya Malla (1321 A.D.) indicate its prevalence in the Sinja area, at the time. In other words, Nepali language is as old as, if not older than, Hindi.

TRN June 12, 1983

'Meaningless' Manners?



There are certain customs and manners that the faithful consider as bearing enough religious merits, if not also salutary benefits. That quite a few of these traditions have, in fact, a solid logical or scientific basis to bolster them up is often overlooked—nay, outright pooh-poohed—by many of us 'moderns'. But, perhaps it is time we cast a more than cursory look into some of the so-called superstitious customs and try to ascertain if it is mere orthodoxy, ignorance or blind faith that has been sustaining them, after all.

An instance that comes readily to mind is the ancestral taboo imposed on us against sweeping houses after nightfall. But, of course, it stands to reason that some tiny yet valuable items that may have fallen on the floors could unwittingly be swept off in the process—and hence the taboo. The fact that one could conveniently overlook such tiny items—like a useful needle, for example—in areas denied of modern electricity-fed brightness (which is the rule rather than an exception in our part of the world) makes it specially meaningful for us to desist from sweeping the floors after nightfall.

Our ancestral tradition of taking off footwears—even clothes in many *Baahun* (priestly) households—before we enter the kitchen to partake of food is another instance in point. It is not for nothing that our ancestors enjoined us to don a freshly laundered 'Dhoti' or at least to remove the work-a-day ensembles as also to thoroughly wash our hands and feet before we squat down—cross-legged and on *pirkaas* placed on the kitchen-floor—to eat. Is it difficult to appreciate that a simple sense of hygiene demands that we observe such practices?

I also remember our having been admonished by our elders if we entered our homes unwashed and unbathed, on returning from funerals. The simple logic behind the idea of taking a bath on such occasions could not have been anything but to help rid us of any infection we may have contacted while accompanying a corpse to the funeral grounds. Additionally, we were also made to stand over a bunch of fuming *titte-paati* leaves placed at the threshholds or at cross-roads on the return journey from a funeral procession. That the *titte-paati* juice often comes in handy as an antiseptic or a blood-coagulant when we have minor cuts and bleeding sores, is known to many of us. The idea, perhaps therefore, was that burnt *titte-patti* leaves could help us disinfect ourselves as we pass through the ritual of inhaling the fumes, no?

Be it a Bada Dashain or Diwali, a Full Moon day or a New Moon one, a child-birth or a death in the family or whatever, we have the custom of smearing our floor with a *gobar* (cow-dung) paste. What's more, a sip of *gomutra*, premixed with a pinch of cow-dung, is even believed to ritually purify us on many a 'polluted' occasion. These customs are regarded by many of us as unhygienic and, therefore, abhorrent. Yet, a recent write-up I went through suggests that fresh cow-dung contains a large proportion of vitamin B-12 which , it is said, is essential for maintaining normal health of the humans—specially because deficiency of this vitamin produces a pernicious type of anaemia. If so, one would perhaps be justified in saying that our forefathers wanted our health to be fortified with small doses of vitamin B-12, either in the shape of the *gawoont* or otherwise!

It is again an age-old tradition with most of us to wear some sort of a *topi* (cap) or *pheta* (turban), particularly when we go out-doors. Even if such traditions are increasingly being given a go-by in cities, they persist in the rural areas. The same write-up, however, holds that there is an increasing evidence in favour of wearing such headgears in order to provide an effective canopy that acts as a protection against sun-strokes, particularly if one works in the farms and fields during day-time.

Why do our elders enjoin us to sleep with our legs pointing towards the north or the south, but not east and the west.? One traditional explanation is that

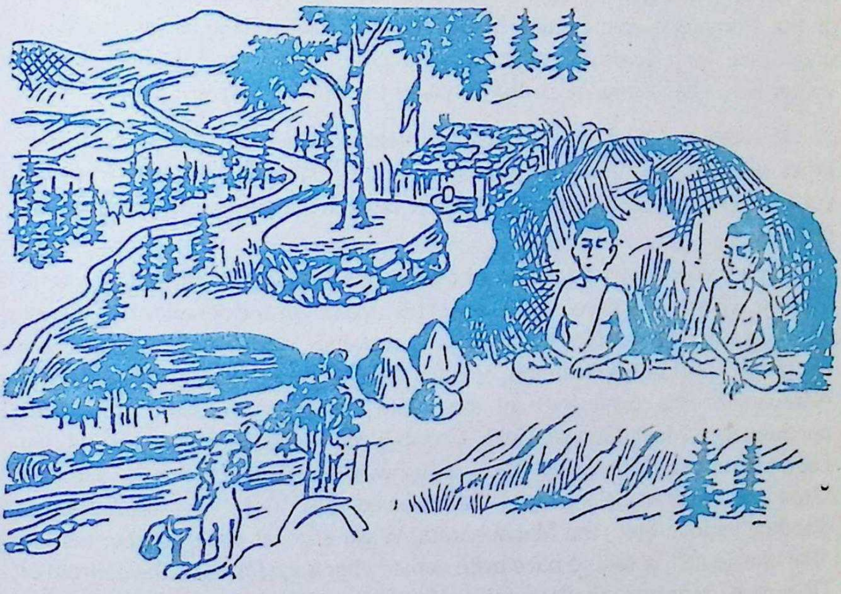
Yama or the Lord of Death is said to reside in the north. Well, could be!But some probes, seemingly carried out by scientists and reported in some publications elsewhere, go to suggest that there is ample justificaiton to support this practice.

"The human body", reads the write-up above-referred, "contains iron and if all of it is collected in one place, it could be wrought into two large nails. It is a known fact that, if an iron rod or a nail is hung North-South in the geomagnetic field for a long time, it automatically attains magnetic properties..."

I have heard it said by one of my namesakes, a Shrestha, and a 'self-made' pioneer of magneto-therapy in Nepal that the value of magnets in curing many of our physical ailments was known to the ancient Greeks and Egyptians as well. Why, even the famous Cleopatra is said to have perennially sported a 'tika' on her forehead, which, he asserts, was nothing but a tiny magnet and was instrumental in helping her maintain the beauty of face and figure that have become so legendary.

Do our traditions of sleeping north-south or of wearing a 'tika', assume a new meaning and significance in view of new scientific findings? If so, could there be more than meets the eye in these 'meaningless' traditions?

Of Some Holy Sites



In one of our earlier write-ups in this series, we have had occasion to throw some light on the mythical sage Vishwamitra's connection with the river Koshi. I also recall my having urged the concerned scholars to throw further light on the many local traditions that seek to link our present-day Biratnagar with the mythological king Birat of the Mahabharata epic fame.

Meanwhile, I have come across some more stories and would like to share them with our readers.

An account seeks, for example, to link an ancient sage, Sankha, with the Sabha river, and its source, the Sabhaa Pokhari, in eastern Nepal hills. The present-day Sankhuwa Sabhaa district, claims the story, got its name from the mythical associations with the same sage Sankha who had made the area his *Ashram* (hermitage).

Also, while the Arun river is also said to have derived its name from king Arunraj of the Mahabharata epic days, the founding of a well-known pilgrim-centre, namely the shrine of Kusheshwar at the confluence of Sunkoshi and

Roshi rivers (in Dumja, eastern Nepal) is attributed to king Kushadhwaja, possibly brother of the legendry king Janaka.

Kapilavastu,another well-known historical site in south-western Nepal terai, and better known in our times for its links with the Sakya king, Suddhodhana, father of Lord Buddha, is said to have got its name from another famous mythical sage, Kapila. Likewise, sage Vashistha, the preceptor of the Ramayana-epic heroes like Rama and Lakshmaṇa, is said to have undergone long years of penance in a cave known as "Vashista Gufa" somewhere near Deoghat on the banks of the Narayani river.

In western Nepal, the river Chepe, said to have been known in ancient times as Champavati, has had its origin in a lake hallowed with the memory of yet another sage, Shringi, whose cave is to be seen there to the present day, it is claimed.

As is well-known, the author of the famous epic, the Ramayana, was sage Valmiki. There are several stories about his meditation and penance that do not bear recounting here. Not so well-known, however, is the "fact" that he spent the greater part of his life in the "Valmiki Ashram", on the eastern bank of the Narayani at the confluence of the Sapta Gandaki. Likewise, the 5-river confluence of Madi, Gunadi, Buldi, Chhabdi and Shukla, near the present-day Damauli on the Kathmandu-Pokhara highway, is believed to be the site of a *Gufa* and *Ashram* belonging to the hallowed sage Vedavyas—the author of another famous epic, the Mahabharata. While another cave nearby, named "Parasar Gufa", is said to have been named after sage Parasar, the *ashram* of Dhaumya *rishi*, yet another mythical sage and preceptor *(purohit)* of the Pandavas, is believed to be located at Shaumya Van, somewhere to the north of the Madi river.

The renowned *Vidyagriha* (educational institution) of the ancient grammarian, Panini, is placed by at least one writer at the top of the Ragimaskot hill. Another place-name, Bhirkot, in its turn, is said to have been a derivative of *Bhrigu*,—meaning the site of sage Bhrigu's 'castle' near which is said to be a pond, also named 'Bhrigu-kunda'. It is here that he edited the well-known *Manusmriti*, adds the writer under reference.

A number of caves, namely, Kailash Gufa, Mugu Gufa, Gorakhsha Gufa, Parsu Gufa, etc., described to be located in the Bhagar area, also figured as the autumnal meditation-centers of Bhrigu Parasurama and the ancient name of Bhagar used to be *Bhargava*, after Bhrigu, it is further claimed.

The Batule Chaur, a familiar spot north of the present-day Pokhara, is also known for a cave named in recent years after late king Mahendra. This cave, claims a source, was the site of Aramudi's meditation, while, not far removed from it on the eastern flanks of the Seti-river, is a location that still features the *Ashram* of sage Vaisampayana, it is said. Another popular meadow, known as Purna Chour, is said to be hallowed with the memories of yet another famous sage, Yagyavalkya.

The well-known *Ayurvedic* medicinal treatise, "Kashyap Samhita", was authored by sage Kashyap while he had been residing in Kaski kot, it is said. While the temple of Gargeshwar in the Syangja district of mid-western Nepal hills is attributed to sage Garga, it is also said that the famous lady-sage, Gargi, was born here; what's more, that was the place where *Garga-Samhita* had been composed, it is claimed.

Other sages, said to have been residents of one or the other place in the Nepal Himalayas, include the well-known Pulastya (at a place called Pulaashram), Bharatmuni (at a place called Bharse near Resunga), Dronacharya (in Dang), etc.

The point that is sought to be made here, however is: interesting as these stories linking one famous sage or the other with a particular place in Nepal undoubtedly are, we can hardly place much credence on them in the absence of supporting evidence, archaeological or otherwise. Nothing may be farther from the truth, but they do help boost our ego somewhat, don't they?

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Of Koshi, Biratnagar & The Mahabharata

A mythological story has it that the famous Aryan sage, Kaushika Vishwamitra, once went to Ayodhya and fetched Rama and Lakshmana with a view to fight against the *Rakshasas* (demons) who had for long been pestering him in his *Ashram*. The two princes were successful in curbing the demons and after escorting them up to Janakpur, where Rama was later to be wedded to Sita, the sage proceeded northwards towards the Himalayan foot-hills. On being asked why he wanted to retire to the mountain fastenesses, sage Kaushika is said to have replied: "Thanks to the love and affection bestowed on me by Kaushiki, my *didi* (elder sister), I find myself always at home in the laps of the Himalayas."

The above anecdote featuring in the well-known Sanskrit treatise, the Valmiki Ramayana (Bala Kanda, 3/-33), goes to indicate that the present-day *Koshi* region in eastern Nepal has had its associations with ancient sages like Vishwamitra—personages, in other words, as old as the story of the Ramayana epic itself. Also, that the term *Koshi*, denoting a river and applied to many rivers to the east of Kathmandu such as the Sun Koshi, Tama Koshi, Dudh Koshi, etc., isn't a new nomenclature but has come down to us almost as a prehistoric legacy.

Coincidentally, as it were, the word *Kushi* or Khushi also means a river in Newari, as is evidenced in terms like *Bhacha Khushi, Sama Khushi,* etc, but the same is not always true in the case of rivers to the west of the Kathmandu valley in general. What's more, as the ancient Kiratas were said to have been the first historic rulers of the entire Nepal Himalayas, and, as it is the Kirat people who are still predominant in the hill areas extending right upto Nepal's eastern borders, a school of thought holds that terms like Koshi and Kushi are not onlv synonymous but also derivatives from a common stock—most probably a Kirati one, rather than Sanskrit.

Vijayapur, the capital of the medieval Sen Kings lying in the viccinity of Dharan—and still a popular pilgrimage center—finds frequent references as a beautiful hilltop city in many earlier texts such as Rudrakhsharanya *Mahatmya.* While it isn't immediately clear as to how ancient this text is, it may be mentioned, in passing, that the famous shrine of *Budaa Subba,*which makes the area so popular, features certain unique traits. It is said, for instance, that a huge bamboo grove that almost forms a canopy over the shrine, is "topless"—in the sense that every single tree in it has a mysteriously "truncated" top! Also, unlike most other temples throughout Hindu Nepal, the priest here belongs not to the Brahmin, but to the Magar stock. And, thirdly, it is said that neither crows nor dewdrops are ever seen in the area, whatever the time of the year!

Of our immediate interest here is the link the local tradition seeks to establish between the foundation of Vijayapur and the *Mahabharata* epic, much as is the case with that of the Koshi region as a whole. It is said, for instance, that the entire Vijayapur hillock was, in fact, a huge sacrificial *Mandap* erected by, among others, the Hercules of the Orient, Bhimsen—the second of the Pandava brothers. It was also he who is said to have driven away all crows and jackals from the area lest they contaminate his holy *mandap*— and, ever since, these birds and animals have never ventured to return there—so goes the local tradition!

Incidentally, if we cast our glance elsewhere in the area, we come across some other place-names which not only lay equal claim to antiquity but would also have us believe that the Pandava brothers lived in this very area during their long exile. One such place, the present-day settlement of Kicchakbadh on the banks of the Mechi river, is, for example, said to have been named after Kichchak, a local chieftain. The story goes that Bhimsen, the he-man among Pandavas, killed Kichchak on seeing him make erotic overtures towards Draupadi, the common wife of himself and his four brothers.

Likewise, Biratnagar in eastern Nepal is another notable place to find mention in the *Mahabharata* epic. It is said that it was the capital of king Birat who ruled over the then *Matsyadesh* or "The Fish Country". Noted historians like Todd, Cunningham and HC. Roy Chowdhury have ruled out the possibility of this Biratnagar having anything whatever to do with the one mentioned in the Mahabharata—and for good reasons too. For one thing, the great physical distance separating Hastinapur, the capital of the Pandava kingdom in the present day Punjab, from our own Biratnagar, negates the possibility of the Pandavas' travel to this place. But then, some other historians like Hunter and Buchanan do offer a counter opinion. "The river Kartoya separated the Matsyadesh with Kamrupa" (present-day Assam), Buchanan is quoted as writing, and Kartoya has been identified with the preset-day river Teesta in north Bengal, thereby lending support to the belief that the present Koshi and Mechi zone terai areas of Nepal did, in fact, form parts of the mythological *Matsyadesh*.

Supporters of the present-day Biratnagar connection with the Pandavas would add, for extra effect, that the Koches, a tribe presently inhabiting parts of south-eastern Nepal and adjacent areas in India, did in fact derive their clan name from Kichchak, and are, therefore, king Birat's descendants!

Susamayagarh, in the Jhapa district, it is also said, was the capital city of Susharma, king of ancient Trigarta (Tirhut.) Also *Satashi Dham* in Jhapa, *Sanguri Dandaa* in between Dharan and Dhankuta, *Birat Pokhar* near Anarmani, etc, are also said to have been connected with the Pandavas one way or the other, which means, in other words, that not only the name Koshi, but also many other areas in the viccinity can lay claims to no less an antiquity than that of the Ramayana and Mahabharata stories themselves!

TRN January 25, 1985

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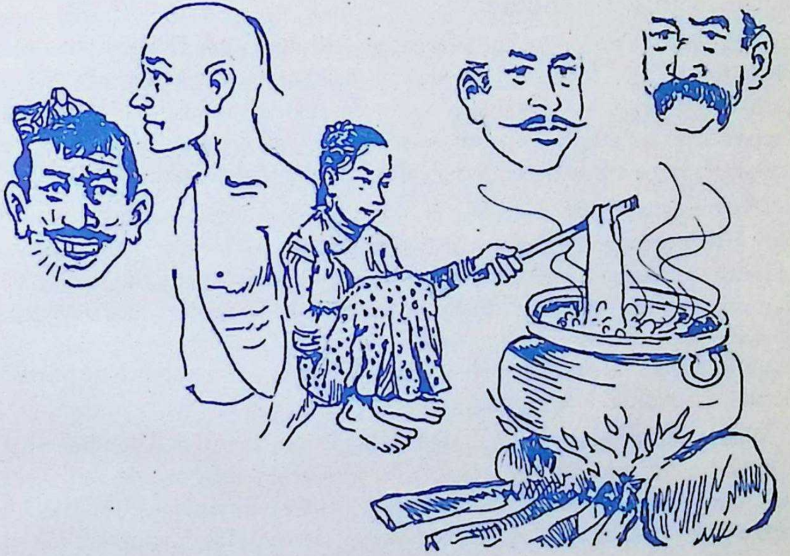
The Missing Links?



Of many ancient customary 'signs' of Hinduism that we have learnt to leave without, the most noticeable is perhaps, the missing *Tupi*! Called the 'pig-tail' by Westerners for lack of a more appropriate and better term, it was, even as late as some two decades back, the sign and symbol of orthodox Brahminism, *par excellence*. One would even be tempted to compare it with an epaullette or a shoulder-star worn by a soldier or policeman as a certificate of having made the grade!

Another close cousin of *Tupi*, also conspicuous by its present-day absence, is the moustache—be it of the handlebar variety or of the walrus one! That Kathmandu's policemen have revived the all-but dead tradition, of late, is a little consolation. Yet, alas, time was when only parentless youngmen were allowed to go around *sans* the moustache!

Little do we come across, too, with people who sport a gold-foiled tooth. One is constrained to say that this is also another evidence of our generation having moved further away from our religion—or from the fear of having to land in hell. For, the precise reason why most of our predecessors favoured the practice was that, somehow, gold had come to be associated with an 'emancipator' of sorts. The belief of yesteryear being that a dying man or woman needed to be 'fed' with gold-washed water as a safe guarantee to a passage to heaven, and with a golden tooth already inside one's mouth, a mere dropping of water on top of it was the most leak-proof guarantee to ensure his or her safe transcedence heaven-wards!

Of course, we no longer bother whether a Brahmin or a Chhetry entwines his holy thread, the *Janai*, around his ear while on his way to attend a call of nature. Why this is so is obvious—most houses, at least in the urban areas, are equipped with toilets that ensure adequate privacy, *minus*, of course, the increasingly rarer sights of 'potato-planting' by the Vishnumati riverside!

Cigarettes are also a twenty-first century innovation, at least in our country. (We are already in the year 2040 of our official calendar, as you know; that is, we are at least ahead of the Westerners in time-reckoning, they being still about half a century behind us, that is, in their 1983!). The great social leveller of the yesteryear was the *Hookah* (again, for lack of a better expression, the Westerners call it the hubble-bubble!) or the *Kakkad* that used to be passed around for a puff, at least among equals.

What about soaps? We were used to the *Rithaa* fruits (I don't bother what the English word for it is!), the ash and the *Kamero* clay! Of course, they were much more effective than the oft-advertised (courtesy: Radio Nepal!) Mahasakti soaps at least in so far as killing the lice was concerned. Boil the garments along with *Kharani* (fuelwood ash) and the lice have not a chance! But, the soap invasion has marred any such prospect, alas!

As you may have read in most of yesteryear's accounts of Nepal—of course penned by the 'perplexed' foreigner—the Nepalese hardly locked their doors when away from houses. That we owe to the Tibetans the practice of locking our doors is evident from the fact that locks we first used—as also the ones that most of our rural people use to this day—are known as the *Bhotay Taalchaas*, meaning "Tibetan Locks", of course! Have you ever seen their enormous sizes? They are just to be seen to be believed!

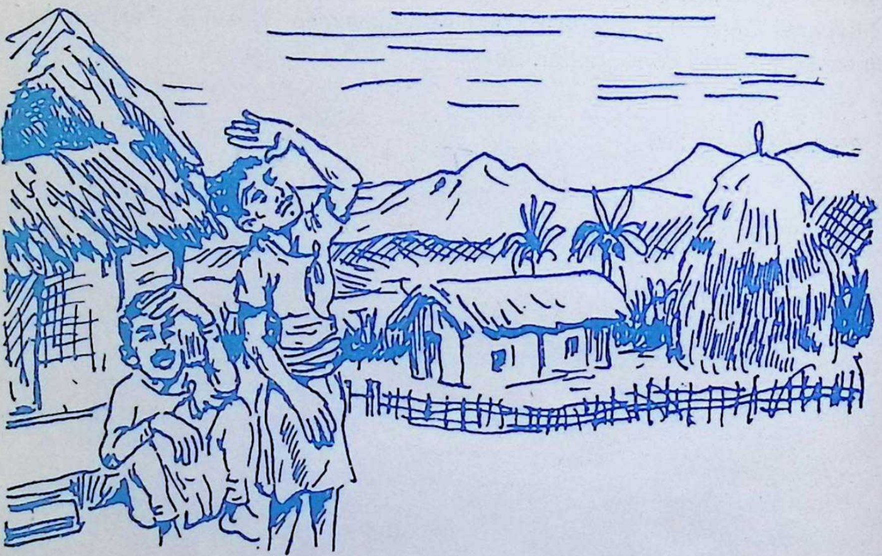
Our ancestors would simply have laughed at 'contraptions' like the Dairy Development Corporation. For, to them, selling of milk was a sin against god! By implication, the selling or buying of a milch-cow or a milch buffalo was taboo too!

Did we have matchsticks? Of course not! Every household had an *Agenaa* (a fireplace) which kept on smouldering the whole day and night—for fuelwood was aplenty. Raising a new fire involved a mere reviving of the semi burnt-out embers, not a re-kindling of new fire. In case the fire extinguished in our own house, the neighbours were more than willing—and ready—to lend you a burning ember. So, where was the necessity of a matchstick?

Now, to conclude, let's dwell upon salt. Those were the days when we sang in praise of "*Bhotako Nuna, Lhasako Suna*", meaning thereby that both our salts and gold came from Tibet. Indian salt was known as 'Saabari' (remember Mahatma Gandhi's Sabar Dardi 'anti-salt' movement?), and Saabari salt was meant for animal consumption alone!

TRN September 27, 1983

What's In A Name?



Some readers, it seems, were intrigued by the recent switchover in this columnist's name from "N. Sharma" to a simple first name, "Nagendra". I didn't mean to intrigue anyone, no, but would like to add, as old Shakespeare has put it, "What's in a name,"?

On second thoughts, however, I realised that, born in a background of *Nwaarans*, horoscopes and *jaat* (caste) denominations, the Shakespearean line not only appears simplistic, but also out of tune with our social realities. For, in most oriental countries like our own, a family name does mean a great deal indeed. And, in this context, we might almost recall that Hannah, by calling her son Samuel, tells the story of her long years of sadness because she had no son, and of her thankfulness when one was given her.

In fact, the most important ceremony connected with the birth of a Hindu or Buddhist child, is the *Nwaaran* or the "name-giving" one. Unlike the Christening, so familiar in the West, it is often preceded by the preparation of a child's horoscope. And the casting of a horoscope, as is perhaps known to many, depends on the exact time and the date of the child's birth. Even in remote parts of Nepal where civilised contraptions like the clock or the wristwatch is still a novelty, parents or close relatives keep a constant vigil at the skies in order to "measure" the exact time of the day (or night) when a baby is born into the household. "The setting sun was jut one cubit above the horizon" or "the baby was born almost as the first crow of the cock was heard" are common-enough expressions one hears in the Nepalese villages. This vigil—and the recording, as accurately as possible, of the time of a child-birth—in a way underscores the Hindu's whole philosophy of life, as it were.

The chief service that the horoscopes; cast by family astrologers and based. primarily on these birth-timings, offer in adult life, is not limited to the determining of the age of its owner. That this alone would be an important service in a country where the registration of births by municipal or government bodies is almost unheard of, is obvious— for one's horoscope is acceptable as an evidence of age even in a government office or a court of law. But that is just one of many. These documents are equally important at the time of marriage— that is, in order to find the right match for a person. In fact, marriage negotiations have been known to have broken off for the simple reason that, when the horoscopes of the would-be bride and bridegrooom were compared, it was found that the two were not "made for each other", or that they were born under mutually hostile stars!

Now, coming to the question of names. My own name, for instance, would have started from, say, the letter "G" or "K" had I been born at a time slightly different than the one I in fact was. For, I owe my name to the particular planet in the Zodiac that the astrologer believed had been ruling at the moment of my birth. A child, to elaborate further, born in the last division of Virgo's rule, cannot be Gopal or Nagendra at all, but perhaps Thakur Nath, because *Th* is the last letter of the Sanskrit word for Virgo. Circumstanced as we are, therefore, by such stellar configurations, from the very time of our births, I could not, even if I wanted, change my first name to anything else but 'Nagendra'!

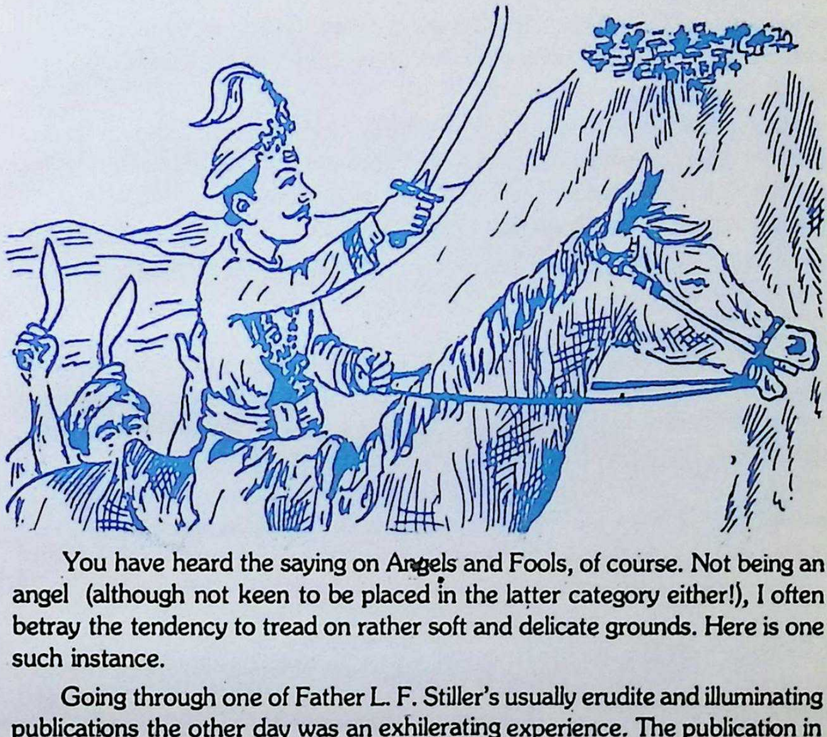
But it is s completely different thing whether I was a 'high-caste' Sharma (i.e., a Brahmin) or even a 'low-caste' *Saarki* (cobbler) for that matter. These surnames determined by one's parentage help identify the owner's caste or family background. It may be stated, too, that though a Nepali bears a family name in addition to one's own first name, one is rarely known by it. Excepting in places where the Western influences have been receiving preference, a man named Nagendra Sharma would seldom be addressed as Sharma, but only as Nagendra— perhaps with a *ji* or *Jyu* as an appellation denoting Mister, that is, if I did deserve such an appellation at all! On the other hand, such surnames could even change along life's way by virtue of a Title (or a Degree) received from a traditional Sanskrit School or College. My family name, Sharma, could, for example, easily change into an Acharya or Shastri, had I been fortunate enough to receive such titles of scholarship!

And, particularly for a Nepali, such surnames as Sharma, Brahmin, Upadhyaya, Chhetry, Rai or Gurung are indicative more of a genus than of a species. Because, even among caste-names like Sharmas, Brahmins or Upadhyayas, there are countless clan divisions, often associated with the place-names which point to their "original homes". A Pokhrel, for instance, can at the same time be either a Brahmin, a Sharma, an Upadhyaya, a Jaisi or a Chhetri—that is, Pokhrel is a clan-name for persons whose ancestors originally hailed either from Pokhara or a place abounding in *Pokharis* (lakes). We could deduce, likewise, that a Sharma (my own *generic* family name, though this could as well have been an Upadhyaya) admits of a more specific clan-name—in my own case, a *Dhungana*—perhaps because my original ancestral home could have been a place called *Dhungen* (a rocky area)!

Thus it is that I decided to drop my surname "Sharma", which I had used heretofore, for, if at all surnames were called for, I would more appropriately, and specifically, be known as Nagendra Dhungana.

And, while I am still at it, I may as well point out that surnames, to me, smack of a hangover of outdated caste or class divisions, which are quite out of context in the present-day world where we all are seeking to do away with casteism with all its vile ramifications. Our goal is—as it should be—a casteless society and all that goes with it. Why, then, must I be known as a Sharma? Isn't Nagendra more apt — and quite enough?

A Question Of Bias?



You have heard the saying on Angels and Fools, of course. Not being an angel (although not keen to be placed in the latter category either!), I often betray the tendency to tread on rather soft and delicate grounds. Here is one such instance.

Going through one of Father L. F. Stiller's usually erudite and illuminating publications the other day was an exhilerating experience. The publication in question is his "Prithvi Narayan Shah in The Light of the *Dibya Upadesh.*" Often translated as the "Divine Counsels," for most Nepalese the *Dibya Upadesh* not merely represents a landmark in the country's literary history, but is regarded as a veritable Geeta in nationalism itself.

Dealing in some detail on the so-called Kirtipur" episode, Fr. Stiller, at one place (pp. 32-34), elaborates the reasons behind the Kirtipureans' surrender to king Prithvi Narayan Shah's onslaughts. In the process, he quotes the late Babu Ram Acharya and Bal Chandra Sharma, among others, and goes on to say:

"...it is clear that (i) there were some sort of negotiations before the surrender of Kirtipur was effected; (ii) the Gorkhalis did not actually conquer the city, but the city opened its gates to them; (iii) the basic difference between the accounts lies in the nature of the negotiations that took place.

"Fr. Guiseppe, the Capuchin monk who was an eye-witness, says that the defenders of Kirtipur surrendered to Prithivi Narayan Shah only on the assurance that a general amnesty would be given. Though there is no other supporting evidence for this opinion other than the fact that it purports to be a first hand observation, it does fit the major outlines of the other opinions given. ...In short, I see no intrinsic difficulty in accepting Fr. Guiseppe's account along with the others."

Having said that Fr. Guiseppe's account is acceptable *as it goes along with the others* in this particular case, Fr. Stiller, however, sees no difficulty in accepting the same account when it relates to the so-called "nose-cutting" episode *even when others do not go along with it* ! Isn't it rather intriguing?

Fr. Stiller, however, is cautious to point out that the nose-cutting episode is being "stated merely as the fact under discussion, without any charge being made concerning it." Whether he is making this point only to avoid a question of his own "bias", as in the case of Fr. Guisppe or not, but perhaps he cannot entirely escape being accused of a certain 'tilt', particularly in the face of Dr. Regmi's conclusion to the effect that "All this (i.e., Fr. Giuseppe's account) seems unduly exaggerated, and an historian has to be cautious in giving credence to it." What is more, Fr. Stiller nevertheless feels that "the more prudent thing is to accept Fr. Giuseppe's account, at least until some further evidence is found to give a firm basis for rejection or revision."

"You seek, and you'll find," goes a Nepali saying. And, Fr. Stiller also seeks, and, of course, finds "some further evidence" in the "fact" that Colonel Kirkpatrick had seen "some of the survivors of this event serving as coolies in his entourage some thirty years later (which) forces one to believe that the event reported (by Fr. Giuseppe) was not an exaggeration but a plain statement of fact."

I am not an historian, I repeat; not even a student of history. But not being either does not render one entirely devoid of a capacity to analyse a situation on assumptions other than purely "historical". And it may not be wholly illogical to make the following assumptions in this context:

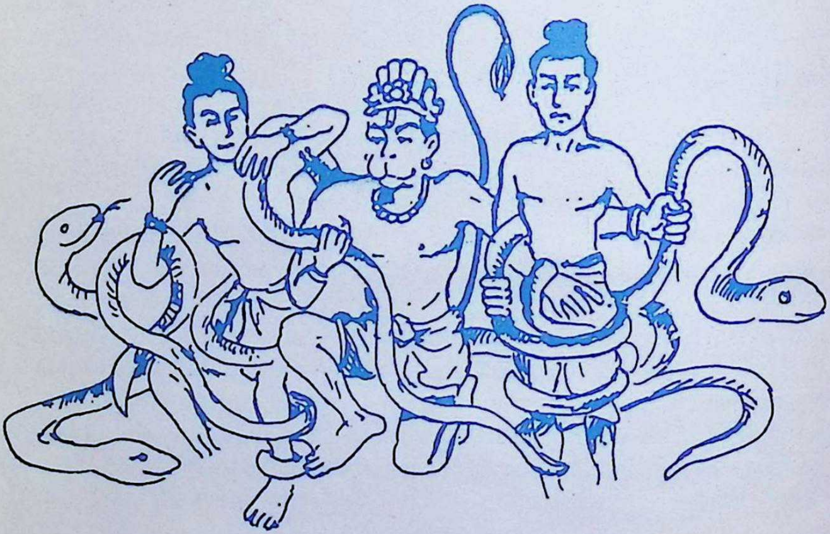
1. Let us first take up the statement of Kirkpatrick. He says that "in resentment of the resistance made by the inhabitants (of Kirtipur), he (Prithvi Narayan Shah) barbarously caused all the males he captured to be deprived of their noses." But does not the very question of "resentment of the resistance" go counter to the argument, as stressed by Fr. Stiller

himself and outlined earlier in this essay, that the surreder of Kirtipur was a result of "negotiations" and not of fight? And, if the surrender was brought about by negotiations, how much credence can we give to Kirkpatrick when he says "in resentment of the resistance"?

2. My second assumption as a layman veers round another statement made by Kirkpatrick and quoted, again, by Fr. Stiller in support of the so-called nose-cutting episode. "We came to the knowledge of this fact in consequence of observing among the porters who transported our baggage over the hills a remarkable number of noseless men..."—— writes Kirkpatrick. Almost everyone who has travelled the stretch from Bhim phedi to Kathmandu along the traditonal trekking route has had to take recourse to "coolies" in transporting baggages over the distance. But in almost 90 per cent of the cases, the coolies comprise, if my own experience is any guide, of Tamangs and such other hillmen and *not* Newars, not to speak of Kirtipureans, who are, by tradition, either farmers or tradesmen or artisans. How many Newar coolies do we see even today, and even in a place like Kathmandu where they form the majority? To add to this, the route taken by Kirkpatrick when he visited Nepal also lends little credence to his assertion. For, according to Dr. D.R. Regmi, Kirkpatrick made his trip not *via* Bhimphedi, but *via* Nuwakot! Can one imagine Kirtipureans working as coolies in far removed Nuwakot?–a natural question arises!

3. Also, in his long career as a soldier and conquerer, beginning from Nuwakot to Lamjung in the west, from Makwanpur to Vijaypur in the south and south-east, from Kathmandu to Patan and Bhaktapur in the Valley, etc., no other instance of barbarity on Prithvi Narayan's part has come to our notice, despite the fact that resistance (and not negotiations as in the case of Kirtipur) had resulted in arousing his "resentment" in *all* cases. In the light of this, therefore, we could have been justified in expecting many other "nose-cutting" episodes, not in Kritipur alone. Can any historian, includig Fr. Stiller, give us another instance of the kind? If not, are we not justified in concluding that the so-called Kirtipur episode is more a fabrication than a fact?

The 'Mahiravan Badh'



One of Nepal's first historic documents, a piece of dramatic literature from Patan, makes and immensely absorbing reading. This is known as the 'Mahiravan Badh' is credited to one poet Jayant, and is dated 1394 B. S. (1337 AD).

It may also be of interest, in this context, to note that a handwritten manuscript of Valmiki's original Ramayana epic, believed to be the world's oldest, is believed enrich the coffers of our National Archives, to this day. But that is a different story and we may have occasion to read about it in a subsequent piece in this series, at a later date.

The Rama-Sita saga is too well-known to deserve repetition here. But the same story, as depicted by the aforesaid play, *Mahiravan Badh*, presents curious departures from the generally accepted popular versions.

One is that there figures, in this story, not merely one Ravan. There were also other Ravans, and at least two of them figuring in the play under reference were known as Mahi Ravan and Ahi Ravan. They have, at places, been described as the principal Ravan's allies (or *mits*) and, at others, as his preceptors or seniors. One is thus led to surmise that the appellation 'Ravan' did not, as in the case of the Janakas of Mithila (also of the Ramayan epic fame), refer to just one character but to a community or tribe to which he beloged.

More interestingly, whereas the 'regular' Ramayans tell us the story of the abduction of Sita, Ram's wife, at the hands of the ten-headed and twenty-armed Ravan, here we come across an episode that revolves round the kidnapping of Ram and Lakshman themselves!

No less amusing is the pride of place accorded to Hanuman as the virtual 'hero' of the play. Unlike the relatively less significant errand-boy or messenger role played by this so-called 'monkey-god' in most Ramayan stories, here he emerges as *the* principal figure, who ultimately saves Rama, otherwise the epic-hero!

Bear with me, dear readers, if I slightly allow my 'theorising' propensities to run slightly wild here too, as I often do. My surmise, in this case, is that Hanuman was not a more monkey, but a full-fledged human being. He may have, for reasons of a dramatic disguise or by virtue of a tradition peculiar to his tribe, donned the mask of a monkey, in the same manner as many a backward Asian or African tribal paints his or her face in a wierd manner, to this day. But the term monkey, as applied to Hanuman, appears to me to be downright derogatory, if not an utter misnomer. Let me add that this surmise is based on Mahiravan's eulogisation of Hanuman as an eminent grammarian (and, also perhaps, as an author of the Ramayan itself!).

However, coming now to the 'Mahiravan' story proper, as is said to appear in the 11th canto of Ananda Ramayan, it briefly unfolds in the play thus:

Mahiravan, the lord of the underworld, is approached by a messenger sent by Ravan who relates to him incidents such as the widespread damage caused to the beautiful Ashok garden, the physical elimination of Akshay Kumar, and the like, wrought by Hanuman. Mahiravan decides to come to Ravan's rescue and proceeds to the shores of the sea where Rama and Lakshman are resting under the protection of Hanuman. There Mahiravan assumes the form of Shugriva, a cousin of Hanuman, and before the latter realises what is happening, grabs both Ram and Lakshman, and vanishes from the scene!

Next we see Ram and Lakshman being dragged to the temple of a goddess as prisoners, their hands and feet tied with the legendary *Nagpas*. As Mahiravan is preparing to behead the two brothers as sacrifice at the altar of goddess Durga, the helpless prisoners are seen praying to Hanuman for sparing their lives. When Mahiravan advises them to bow before the goddess, however, Ram's reply is: "We haven't learnt to do such a thing."

As if in answer to the prayer of the two brother-prisoners, Hanuman dramatically enters the scene and is immediately involved in afisticuff with Mahiravan. At the end of a long drawn-out fight, Mahiravan succumbs to Hanuman's blows.

Hanuman then turns his attention towards Ram and Lakshman. He tries his best to disentangle them from the *Nagpas* (a noose made of serpents) but finds himself unsuccessful. Meanwhile, the man-bird, Garud, —traditionally the vehicle of Lord Vishnu, whose human incarnation Ram is believed to be— arrives for their rescue and drives away the serpents with violent flapping of his wings.

The story ends with a scene of a happy reunion between Ram, Lakshman and Hanuman on the one hand and the waiting Shugriva, Bibhishan, etc. on the other.

From the story recounted above, the "Mahiravan Badh" appears to be a play within a play—that is, it highlights and dramatises just one sequence taken out o the Ramayan epic-story. But, even as a separate play, it is complete in itself and nowhere does it appear as being detached from the main context.

A few points may, however, be noted here. One is the fact,referred to above, of Hanuman being regarded by Mahiravan as an eminent grammarian and an erudite scholar. Which only goes to support the surmise that Hanuman was a human being and not a monkey.

Secondly, the story revolves round some further exploits of Hanuman, often missing in most versions of the Ramayan epic.

The third point of note is Ram's refusal to pay obeisance at the altar of goddess Durga ("as he didn't know such a thing") who, on the other hand, is apparently a patron deity of Mahiravan or the Rakshasas. It implies, in other words, that Durga-worship, which forms such an important and integral part of today's Hinduism, particularly of the variety practised in Nepal, was perhaps exotic to the cult at the time the Ramayan was written.

And, lastly, the "Mahiravan Badh", as it was written in the early part of the 14th century, does not only from a link in the long chain of Nepal's dramatic literature but is also the first such work to come down to posterity. For those readers who are interested in going through the play in greater detail—and in its Sanskrit and Prakrit originals along with a Nepali transliteration thereof—I would like to suggest they go through the play brought out by the noted researcher, Gyan Mani Nepal, and published recently by the Centre of Nepalese and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University.

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Nagendra Sharma

By the same author:

1. NEPAL A to Z, 1978 – An Alphabetical Nepal Handbook
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6. "ANDAADEKHI BHYAAGUTAASAMMA", ("From Egg to Frog", a collection of essays), 1986
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